

# **THE CANADIAN FARMWORKERS UNION: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND LABOUR ARRANGEMENTS**

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE  
DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF ARTS

In the  
Department of Geography and the Environment

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UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY

Winter 2016

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### **The Canadian Farmworkers Union: Social Movements and Labour Arrangements**

Tyler A. Blackman

## **ABSTRACT**

In the 1970s, many Canadians were shocked to hear of the woefully unfit working conditions and discrimination of farm labourers, particularly in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The labour force was characterised by predominantly new immigrants, most of whom who were women, children, and elders. The working conditions of that time motivated key individuals to instigate a movement to seek justice for these marginalised workers. Using archival material and semi-structured interviews this study focuses on the formation, efforts, and flows of the Farm Workers Organising Committee (FWOC) and shortly thereafter the Canadian Farm Workers Union (CFU) from 1979 until approximately 1993. This time period and the struggle of seasonal and full-time farm labourers is well documented as the emergence of a trade union that influenced improved working conditions for farm labourers. However, the FWOC and CFU had emerged using strategies that were not typical of traditional trade unions of that time. The CFU operated outside of the typical arrangements of traditional trade unions to make their organisational effort possible. Despite the CFU's eventual decline they were a pivotal group for enhancing farmworkers rights and voice in the province. This thesis argues that the FWOC and the CFU are better positioned as a social movement when examining the evolution of the movement's strategies, goals, and outcomes.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This honours research has been linked to a constant state of interrogating my own ideas of 'research' in a very short duration. There have been several very important individuals throughout this time of internal appraisal and constant concerns of 'finishing' my research I must acknowledge. Firstly, I thank Garry Fehr for taking me on as a student and giving me the correct amount of space to design and carry out this project in my own way. Whenever I started to drift off-track you ensured I did not crash entirely. Secondly, I thank Satwinder Bains for providing me with important starting points for my interviews. Lastly, but not least I would like to thank Terah Sportel. Your office door was always open to me with your desire to listen. You gracefully provided me with some of the most challenging questions and critical appraisals of my research process.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to Monica, Andy, and Janelle who in one way or another always supported me in their own fashion. It is also dedicated to a special place I found but have not forgotten, church steps in Queens – you will know.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>APPROVAL .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>DEDICATION .....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHAPTER II: CONCEPTS AND THEORIES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.....</b>	<b>14</b>
LABOUR GEOGRAPHY, GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT .....	15
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS THEORY .....	19
GEOGRAPHY, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, AND THEIR INTEGRATION .....	22
<b>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>27</b>
INTERVIEW DESIGN .....	28
CONTACTING PARTICIPANTS.....	29
INTERVIEW PROCEDURE .....	30
ANALYSIS OF COMPLETED INTERVIEWS.....	30
LIMITATIONS TO STUDY .....	32
<b>CHAPTER IV: CFU CORE ORGANISING AND THE FRAMING PERSPECTIVE .....</b>	<b>35</b>
THE DIAGNOSTIC FRAME: REASONS FOR ORGANISING AND SHARING THE PROBLEM .....	35
THE PROGNOSTIC FRAME: STRATEGIES OF ORGANISING AND STATING SOLUTIONS .....	44
<i>Community Organising: English as a Second Language.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Traditional Union Organising: Full Time/Year Round Farmworkers .....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Legislative Change: Recognising Workers Under the Law .....</i>	<i>51</i>
SUMMARY OF THE PROGNOSTIC AND DIAGNOSTIC FRAME .....	54
<b>CHAPTER V: THE COUNTER-FRAME AND CHALLENGES TO ORGANISING .....</b>	<b>57</b>
THE COUNTER-FRAME AND COUNTER ORGANISING.....	57
STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES .....	62
COMMUNITY CHALLENGES AND CFU ORGANISING .....	65
SUMMARY: WHY THE CFU COULD NOT SUSTAIN ITSELF .....	69
<b>CHAPTER VI: SOCIAL MOVEMENT OR TRADE UNION? .....</b>	<b>72</b>
PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES ON THE CFU AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT .....	73
THE CFU AS A PRECURSOR TO SCHUMPETERIAN UNIONISM? .....	76
SUMMARY: A MATTER OF SCALES, SPACES, AND PLACES.....	80
<b>CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>WORKS CITED .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE &amp; CODING CHART .....</b>	<b>93</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The hierarchy of farmworkers and control.....	40
Figure 2: Geographic structuring of the CFU, flows and influences of space and place in the organising period (1979 – 1993).....	80

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Example of specific grievance identification in interviews.....	39
Table 2: Key CFU events focused on legislative change – compiled from CFU Chronology and Archival Documents (Berggold 2015).....	56
Table 3: Canadian farm sizes: western and prairie provinces (Adapted from Binning 1986).....	62
Table 4: A comparison of Schumpeterian unionism (Tufts 2009) versus CFU unionism.....	78



## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Agriculture in British Columbia (BC) has a unique history and corresponding temporal social geographies. After settlement of BC, the growth of agriculture in the province has resulted in differentiated regional production: wheat and ranching cattle in the interior grasslands; orchard fruits in the Okanagan; and berries in the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley (Demeritt 1997). BC's diverse agricultural activities have specific labour requirements that have been met by particular social groups throughout time and space. It has been argued that only in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that North American social scientists "rediscovered the countryside – the farms, the fields, and villages where, until quite recently, the vast majority of people lived in local worlds of kith and kin" (Demeritt 1995, 29). Renewals in the study of BC's agricultural history have paid far too little attention to the historical development of farmworkers. Specifically, historical labour arrangements and agricultural social geographies of the Lower Mainland warrant more attention because of their importance to the different cultural identities and politics of the province. Not the least of these under-representations are the ways in which labourers have organised themselves to challenge these social geographies through political opportunity and organisation. Workers matter, their actions matter, and how they organise both within and outside of the workplace is of importance to local and regional studies.

The working conditions of farmworkers have been the site of contestation in BC for generations. Strikes and work stoppages amongst farmworkers have been occurring as early as 1928 (Jensen 2014). It was not until 1975 that farmworkers were included under BC's *Labour Code* (Jensen 2014). This permitted agricultural workers to officially form unions and engage in collective bargaining, the same rights that other workers in BC had earned in 1937. Life as a farmworker after this inclusion was not improved immediately. The labour force in the 1970s

was characterised by predominantly recent South Asian (Indian) immigrants who were mostly women, children, and elders (Bush 1995; Johnson 2004). Racialized policies in the past prevented South Asians from owning or renting agricultural property (Demeritt 1995) and excluded them from union jobs in the province (Walton-Roberts 1998) resulting in many turning to farm work for employment. The working conditions were described as harsh, with long hours consisting primarily of strenuous manual labouring on farms with no shelter from the outside elements (Berggold 2011; Johnson 2004). Furthermore, protection from harmful agricultural pesticides was insufficient (Bush 1995). Housing for seasonal workers was often of poor quality and even hazardous (Bush 1995; Jensen 2014). However, perhaps most unifying in frustrations for the workers were the issues of piece-rate wages managed by labour contractors, who profited from this vulnerable workforce (Jensen 2014; Johnson 2004). According to interviews conducted in this thesis, South Asian farmworkers began to express their own discontent within their cultural community concerning workplace safety, not getting paid properly, and other grievances with labour contractors.

The working conditions and continued complaints from labourers motivated key individuals within the South Asian community to instigate a movement to seek justice. In 1979, eight South Asian men met and formed the Farmworkers Organising Committee (FWOC). The committee hoped to expose the woefully unfit working conditions of farmworkers and in its first membership drive obtained 700 new recruits (CFU 1983, 11). On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1980 the FWOC transformed into the Canadian Farmworkers Union (CFU), held its founding convention, and became the first union in Canada's history centred on farmworkers (CFU 1983, 13). The CFU's active period was from 1980 until 1993 when it eventually declined and was no longer able to

sustain itself as a union body. But how, exactly, did the CFU come into being and what was its significance to the Lower Mainland and beyond?

In contemporary historiographies, the CFU is widely recognised as a regional trade union that was unable to sustain itself as a traditional union ‘should.’ Is it good enough to remember the CFU as just a failed trade union? In order to interrogate the CFU’s historical significance, this thesis aims to answer three central questions: (1) How was the CFU able to organise agricultural labour in Canada when others could not? (2) Why was the CFU unable to sustain itself? (3) Was the CFU a trade union or a social movement? The common depiction of the CFU as only a trade union is a more simplistic viewing of a moment in Canadian history that directly challenged agricultural institutions, labour arrangements, and the social geographies of agricultural labour in the Lower Mainland of BC. This thesis research presents the CFU as a much more complex entity, where the one size fits all classification of a concluded trade union is insufficient.

The historical record of the CFU is rich, but there have been very few major academic studies of agricultural labour and social movements in British Columbia with the exception of Binning (1986), Encalada (2006), (Russo 2012), Paz-Ramirez (2013), and Jensen (2014), Social movements have been studied across disciplines. Since the 1970s, both sociology and geography have had parallel, and in some cases diverging growth, in both the study and theoretical conceptualisations of labour and social movements. In order to analyse the CFU, answer the central research questions, and review the historical significance of the organising movement this thesis draws on both sociological and geographical literatures. Specifically, the sub-discipline of labour geography and social movements theory found within sociology. To obtain a more refined understanding of the movement, semi-structured interviews with past union organisers or

members were conducted. This study has the potential to build upon the growing and evolving theories on social movements and contribute to more nuanced understandings of their formation and lifespan.

The unionisation of farm labourers in Canada was significant because at the time none had previously organised with any great success. Traditional unions have focused on large-scale workplaces and disciplining workers into following contracts (Lier 2007; Tufts 2009). This has been called business unionism or unionism embedded in the market instead of society (Coe 2012). The CFU operated outside of these typical union arrangements to make their organisational effort possible. As a movement, the CFU drew support from variegated constituencies outside of the workplace alone. The task of organising farm labourers dispersed across small farms of the Lower Mainland required substantial resource mobilisation and framing of the movement to broader publics for support. Without vital resources worker mobilisation is not possible (McCarthy and Zald 1977; McCarthy and Zald 2002). This thesis uses social framing theory (Snow et al. 1986; Snow et al 2014) to reveal how social movements use framing to alter perceptions of space and place at different scales and draw support for their cause. Framing enhanced the CFU's ability to organise by gaining vital community support and resources. The CFU engaged in both unionism and social activism rather than separating the two. Thus, the CFU is better understood as a social movement. The CFU had enormous success at raising the voices of farmworkers and after many years of struggling, farmworkers were brought into the existing health and safety regulations they had been excluded from for so long. However, as a traditional trade union, the CFU arguably did not succeed. Significant structural challenges were too difficult to overcome for organisers and the workers themselves to maintain

a union. Additionally, the CFU faced major hurdles as it navigated the cultural community of its organisational base.

These ebbs and flows of the CFU's mobilisation are not unimportant and demonstrate how the geographic structuring of social movements is vital to the successes and failures of mobilisation (Miller 2000). Groups cannot function without producing and inhabiting space (Lefebvre 1991). Without space, the ideas and representations held by these groups evaporate. Social movements have continually evolved with the changing political economic contexts they are part of and as such there is a need to revisit their histories and critically examine the dynamics of space and place in the construction of mobilisation (Wolford 2004) across different 'terrains of resistance' (Routledge 1996). By examining the CFU outside of the trade union container and understanding it as a social movement across time and space, a greater agency is given to the phenomena and its impacts better understood.

The structure of this thesis going forward will be broken down into six chapters. Chapter II will consist of an in-depth literature review examining the development of theories on labour and social movements. More specifically, the review will draw attention to the detailed theoretical frameworks that are central to this study, resource mobilisation theory and social framing theory, and their place in geographic contexts. Chapter III contains the methodology, challenges faced in data collection, and limitations to this study. Chapter IV contains the discussion of the CFU case study from the framing perspective. Chapter V will discuss the many challenges to organising and reasons for the CFU's eventual decline. Chapter VI is a discussion on why the CFU is best represented as a unique social movement compared to only a trade union. Finally, Chapter VII will conclude by outlining and evaluating the answers to the three central research questions, and describe potential next steps.

## **CHAPTER II: CONCEPTS AND THEORIES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

The disciplines of sociology and geography have contributed to the study of agriculture, labour, and social movements in their own ways. This literature review takes stock of prominent scholarship within these disciplines relevant to understanding both social movements and labour. Furthermore, this review attempts to form connections between the literature to create a more robust and wide scope of materials and approaches that can be used to answer the central research questions. Specifically, writings within the sub-discipline of labour geography were consulted. Labour geography in the past two to three decades has transformed significantly but is arguably best described as a work in progress (Castree 2007). Labour geography has had meaningful contributions and deserves credit as it continues to move forward. Labour agency (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011; Herod 1997) and scales of worker organisation have been popular areas of research (Coe 2012; Lier 2007). Despite labour geography's contributions, a stronghold of social movements theory has been established in sociology. For example the early growth of Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983; McCarthy and Zald 2002), community organisation and political process (Tilly 1973; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Tilly 1978), diffusion of social movements and ideas (McAdam and Rucht 1993), and social framing theory (Snow et al. 1986; Benford 1997; Snow and Benford 2000). Labour geography is relevant here because of the focus on sense of place and spaces of mobilisation as key parts to understanding the CFU's success, while social movements theories provide valuable frameworks that explain how social movements act and why.

To address the literature available, this chapter is broken down into three sections. The first two sections consist of respective reviews of labour geography and social movement theories in sociology. The third section is a discussion of how these literatures are enmeshed and

provide more robust understandings of social movements overall. A very limited number of scholars have approached social movements with more explicit interdisciplinary methods that bridge geographic theory with social movement theories. In this case, there is potential for geography and sociology to contribute in shared discourses of social movements in more intentional ways.

### ***Labour geography, growth and development***

From the early 1970s to late 1990s discussions of labour in academia were dominated by Marxist theories with a focus on the structures of capitalism that regulate matters of production and the accumulation of capital. One of the most prolific pieces in geography is *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* by Doreen Massey, with the first edition in 1984 and the second in 1995. The book is significant because it argues, using a considerable number of case studies in the United Kingdom, that spaces of labour are better conceptualised in terms of power-filled relations (Massey 1995). Massey wrote that “spatial structures are established, reinforced, combated and changed through political and economic strategies and battles on the part of managers, workers, and political representatives...they are ‘the object of political struggles’” (Massey 1995, 310). Other scholars around the same time took similar directions, such as Derek Gregory and John Urry’s *Social Relations and Spatial Structures* from 1985 (Gregory and Urry 1985). Another strong account of capitalist development and its geographical determinations was *The Limits to Capital* by David Harvey, first published in 1982 with a new edition in 1999 (Harvey 1999). These books provide essential understandings of the role that labour plays in space making and that spaces of work are not benign or created out of an apolitical process, but rather they are evolving and contested. The understanding of power relations in labour arrangements is essential. Power relations unfold in

and produce space as well as host and contribute to the understanding of place. Henri Lefebvre explained how groups, classes, or fractions of classes are recognisable by the spaces they inhabit and create (Lefebvre 1991). The array of geographic concepts such as landscapes, territory, space, and place are by no means unanimously defined or utilised within geography. However, these concepts can provide significance to understanding workers and the spaces they inhabit as inconstant, not static, and with complexity, not simplicity. Simply put workers matter, their actions matter, and how they both perceive and negotiate space and place matters.

There is, however, some major criticism that Massey, Harvey, and many other Marxist scholars faced. A general summary of these criticisms is how Marxist explanations and structural phenomena often represented labour as vacant in power when the reality is possibly different. Noel Castree described the agency of labour as a signature part of labour geography, yet “paradoxically agency is both under-theorised and under-specified in most labour geographers’ analysis of it” (Castree 2007, 858). Don Mitchell criticised the bulk of labour geography for failing to put “*working people* at the centre of analysis” (Mitchell 2005). Despite these criticisms of a more telegraphed labour geography, it has been noted that labour geography has had “commendable progress in taking seriously the challenge of transcending the traditional worker stereotype” by considering migrant workers, female workers, and work in the informal sector (Lier 2007, 830). This explanation of labour geography’s critiques is extremely over-simplified, but again it led to new currents and the development of labour geography into what it has become today.

As geography and the social sciences as a whole began to move away from traditional Marxist approaches, labour geography started to have a breakthrough period establishing itself as a sub-discipline. Andrew Herod wrote a seminal piece, where he suggested a needed turn away



from a 'Geography of Labour' towards a 'Labour Geography' (Herod 1997). Herod argued that workers as "active geographical agents have tended to receive rather short shrift from geographers" (25). Labour geography was too narrowly focused on trade unionism and had a serious theoretical gap – a gap which Herod suggested could be filled (1997). Labour geography continued to expand and become more concretely defined. Herod, Peck, and Wills (2003) began to observe a transformation of labour geography research and other related fields that embraced new issues as "diverse as the organization of domestic work, the social constitution of workplace identities, the governance of local labour markets and labour control regimes, and emergent forms of labour activism from the very local to the truly global"(177). Around the same time, Herod published *Labour Geographies: Workers and the Landscapes of Capitalism*, which is a comprehensive piece that bridges cultural geography, economic geography, and labour studies (Herod 2001). Labour geography may have theoretically transitioned away from overt Marxist approaches, but its roots have not entirely been erased. Labour geography has never been focused on improved administration of labour and as much as it has been *about* labour it has also tried to be *for* labour (Castree 2007). If labour geography is *for* labour, then it must not categorically represent and reinforce labour as powerless. The diversity of labour that has become more explicitly theorised beyond a simple category of working class has led to new emerging understandings of labour agency.

One of the most persistent challenges for labour agency studies is how to effectively define agency and how to study it in a way that does not disempower the labour itself. Cindi Katz elected to reimagine labour agency by studying it under three discrete categories: resilience, reworking, and resistance (Katz 2004). Many studies of labour agency were primarily focused on the resistance strategies workers employed to better their situation, rather than looking at a

variety of strategies that exist outside of what would be considered resistance. Again this put a narrow emphasis on trade unionism and work stoppages. Katz's categorization of agency has been taken further to demonstrate how both collective and individual forms of agency both resist and attempt to recalibrate power relations (Cumbers et al. 2010). Cumbers et al. (2010) took Katz (2004) work and argued that labour cannot be "relegated to the role of victims rather than considered as conscious agents" (Cumbers et al. 67). Workers as conscious agents act within union or social movement contexts. Because of this, the categorisation of unions and social movements is important for understanding collective worker agency. Tufts (2009) argued that unions were described too narrowly in the literature and as a result created his model for Schumpeterian unionism. Schumpeterian unionism focuses on "how different scales of worker mobilization or state control can be engaged with to the advantage of workers" (Tufts 2009, 989). By broadening discussions of how unions or social movements are classified workers are better represented as conscious and active not ephemeral and lacking agency. Despite the movement in labour geography to better account for labour's agency, it does not change the reality that agency is greatly constrained by certain broader structural processes and social relations (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011; Sportel 2013). Overall labour geography is still fledgling and has faced several accounts of success and continued challenges going forward.

By these accounts, labour geography has contributed meaningful discussions about labour but must continue to be innovative and evaluate its purpose in both theoretical praxis and more pragmatic approaches that seek to advance the position of workers (Castree 2007; Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011; Coe 2012; Lier 2007). Although labour geography has been at times focused on political action and collective action, very little work exists which concentrates explicitly on the geographies of social movements incorporating the varied social movement theories existing

outside of geography. Routledge (1996) focused on the different spaces social movements had to traverse or ‘terrains of resistance.’ Political ecologists have spent significant time writing about social movements, but with a greater focus on development (Peet and Watts 2002). The most comprehensive scholarship explicitly incorporating social movement theories is Miller’s (2000) work focused on the geography of social movements in North America. With so few geographers utilising social movements theory from sociology, a review of their contributions is warranted.

### ***Social Movements Theory***

Social movements theory, much like labour geography, grew out of processes of interrogating frameworks and theoretical inadequacies over time. In the 1960’s sociologists focused primarily on explaining individual participation in social movements, utilising theories that observed sudden increases of individual grievances being produced by structures of rapid social change (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983). Jenkins (1983) argued that these specific theories, despite varying practices, had shared assumptions of movement participation being significantly rare, grievances being fleeting, movement and institutionalised actions being clearly separate, and social movement actors being seen as irrational (Jenkins 1983). Jenkins countered these methods earlier by analysing farmworkers in the United States from 1947 – 1972 and recognising how vital resource mobilisation was to sustaining labour organising (Jenkins and Perrow 1977). The deficiencies in social movements theory combined with a need to explain the evolving nature of social movements occurring in more affluent societies led to the development of RMT (McCarthy and Zald 2002). McCarthy and Zald (2002, 54) write that “self-interest alone was an inadequate basis to account for the contribution of effort to the pursuit of the collective goods those social movements seemed to be involved in”. RMT in its most simplified form is the

conceptualising of what role resources play in the ebbs and flows of social movements, how social movement organisations (SMOs) go about acquiring resources, and how they use resources (Jenkins 1983; McCarthy and Zald 2002).

RMT and its variations have not gone without criticism. Two of the most significant criticisms were that: (1) RMT had a focus on how resources were used, not what kind (McCarthy and Zald 2002), and (2) that RMT failed to consider the role of ideology remaining somewhat muted on cultural perspectives in social movements (Buechler 1993). Furthermore, RMT does not identify the role of the “emotions of protest” (Jasper 1998). Emotions are an integral part of social movements. Emotions are used to further the movement through collective identity, values, and appealing to broader publics (Jasper 1998). Emotions cannot be discounted from discussions of gaining access to resources. Although challenging to recognise and provide evidence for, emotions are part of the strategic actions of SMO’s use of resource mobilisation. RMT over time has been adapted and used with other social movement theories, showing its lasting applicability to the field of study (McCarthy and Zald 2002). RMT is still relevant and foundational because regardless of current contexts no social movement can succeed without resources. What these resources are, how they are acquired, and what role they play in the SMO process is still being explored today (McCarthy and Zald 2002; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011).

Social framing is another theory of significance that has gained widespread appeal in the study of social movements. Framing theory has had an enduring sense of value in the work of social movements for the past three decades. Over 25 years ago Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford published *Frame Alignment Process, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation*, where they developed a conceptual and theoretical framework out of Goffman’s frame analytic perspective (Snow et al. 1986). The framing perspective has been primarily deployed to

investigate social movement processes and understand chiefly “the generation, diffusion, and functionality of mobilizing and counter-mobilizing ideas and meanings” (Snow and Benford 2000). Framing has also been more simplistically defined as “the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (Chong and Druckman 2007, 104). Framing is more than the everyday words and actions of individuals or groups. Snow and Benford (2000, 614) describe the collective action frames coming out of social movements as “active” and an “evolving process”. In this way, the negotiation of ideas and meaning gives agency to social movements as they attempt to reconfigure or challenge what Michel Foucault posited as truth regimes (Foucault 2001). Although this theory has been expanded significantly, the essential framing tasks that were originally identified still remain useful for the analysis of social movements.

The core framing operations are diagnostic framing and prognostic framing (Snow and Benford 2000). Borrowing from Snow and Benford (2000), this study uses the ideas of diagnostic frames as sharing the problem at hand and prognostic frames as stating and acting out solutions to these problems. These core tasks allow for SMOs to articulate and develop significant networks of meaning and ideas of the social movement. Importantly, framing reveals both the ‘how’ regarding specific social movements formation and what challenges to organising exist. Research using collective action frames (diagnostic and prognostic) to better understand movement organisation have emerged connecting both structural and cultural perspectives on social movements (Snow et al. 2014). Understanding frame as both a noun and framing as a verb gives the theory more flexibility. This allows researchers to both “examine the processes by which grievances were constructed, contested, and disseminated (framing) as well as describe, assess, and compare the products of those interactions or ideational work (frame)” (Snow et al.

2014, 30). The use of framing as a verb is not insignificant, as it gives agency to actors and recognises that framing is something that is actually done and alive, not just an inert abstraction.

The rapid development of the framing perspective has not been without growing pains. In 1997, Benford synthesised his insiders' critique of the social movement framing perspective (Benford 1997). Benford addressed a host of criticisms directly responding to the "neglect of systematic empirical studies, a descriptive bias, static tendencies, reification (and related problems such as a tendency to anthropomorphize reified constructs, the neglect of human agency, and the neglect of emotions), reductionism, an elite bias, and monolithic tendencies" (423). Since this time, the framing perspective has continued to be examined critically. Prominent proponents of the theory and its contemporary usage have continued to be self-reflective, address continued issues with the theory, and demonstrated the continued value of the framing perspective despite challenges (Snow et al. 2014). Framing without a doubt has become part of the wider nexus of ways in which to understand the social construction of meaning and ideas. This perspective warrants attention as well as providing a way forward in which to atomise the complexity of social movements.

### ***Geography, Social Movements, and their Integration***

Labour geography, social movements theory, and the claims they make require careful examination. As demonstrated, both areas of study have had a considerable level of informed critique and evaluation. In recent years, geographers have started to theorise how key geographic concepts of space, place, and scale have significance in social movements. Very few geographers have spent significant time studying social movements (Miller 2000; Routledge 1996). However, several key pieces of literature can be examined in consideration of how social movement theory

and geography can be enmeshed to some extent. This section attempts to review these literatures and summarise their value.

Perhaps the most robust inclusion of social movement theory and geography is Miller's *Geography and Social Movements: Comparing Anti-nuclear Activism in the Boston Area* (Miller 2000). Miller sets out to recognise and interrogate the ways in which "geographic structuring of a social movement has important implications for its mobilization and demobilization, successes and failures" (xii). He recognises that transforming geography can lead to transforming power relations, therefore social movements are often struggling over "the construction of geographies" (xii). Miller undertakes a substantive review of the literature on social movements. He argues that "space is viewed as little more than a container for aspatial social processes..." (6) and that spatial structures of mobilisation get no recognition. Of specific importance is how Miller addresses scale and its importance to social movements: "Scale issues are clearly inherent in the strategies of social movements. Scale variations in political opportunity structures, for instance, may cause movements to emphasize decentralized struggle within local states or to focus on the central state. Likewise, contested framings of the appropriate geographic scale at which to address particular social issues may dramatically affect the legitimacy of a movement" (18).

Miller's work has not gone without some criticism. Social geographer Sallie Marston contended that Miller's use of Habermas' theory of communicative action left the piece exposed to traditional critiques such as tendencies of universalism, essentialism, and a lack of attention to difference (Marston 2001). Despite this reservation, Marston overall supports Miller's effort in attempting to reconcile the sociological and geographical theories towards social movements (2001). Sociologist Dingxin Zhao had a much more scathing review of Miller's book stating that Miller's main arguments can be boiled down to geographic "jargon [that] carries no mechanism

of its own” (Zhao 2001, 1838). Zhao’s critique, however, is extremely limited being only a short book review and giving very little thoughtfulness to the book in its totality, instead focusing on how space, place, scale are flawed concepts in their own right. Zhao would likely find greater difficulty arguing that much of geography as a discipline can be boiled down to jargon. Nevertheless, Miller’s work has remained not only under problematised but also underutilised in general. Given the overwhelming theorisation and use of case studies, it would be a mistake to say Miller’s work should be dismissed. On the contrary, Miller’s book is the most comprehensive work in terms of addressing the long-standing lacuna of entangling social movement theories and geographic theories together in meaningful ways. Going forward, more nuanced pieces of literature within geography can be reviewed to understand just how geographers are attempting to use social movement theories within their field since Miller’s seminal work.

According to Google Scholar, since being published in 2003 Hilda Kurtz’s article *Scale frames and counter-scale frames: constructing the problem of environmental injustice* has been cited 222 times (Kurtz 2003). This article has gained the most traction concerning scale and framing thus far in geography. Kurtz focused on a specific environmental justice movement in Louisiana where she examined the way activists “invoke geographic scale(s) to negotiate the meaning and extent of environmental injustice, both among themselves and for the benefit of government decision-makers” (888). The creation of the collective action frame by Snow and Benford (Benford 1997; Snow et al. 1986) informed her practices when integrating scale. Kurtz conceptualised *scale frames* as “the discursive practices that construct meaningful (and actionable) linkages between the scale at which a social problem is experienced and the scale(s) at which it could be politically addressed or resolved” (Kurtz 2003, 894). Kurtz’s work has



continued to find its way into geographic literature related to both discussions of scale, new social movements, and environmental justice (see for example, Leitner and Miller 2007; Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008; Holifield 2009; Holifield, Porter, and Walker 2010). Kurtz conceptualised *counter-scale frames* that are also part of this negotiation of meaning and ideas (Kurtz 2003). Scale frames look beyond traditional hierarchical scale partitions found in geographic inquiry *vis a vi* the more abstract “multiple idioms of scale, scale frames and counter-scale frames acts as lenses” (913). Scale frame provides a very specific example of bringing geographic method into the study of social movements.

Around the same time as scale-frame was being developed by Kurtz, Wolford also turned to Snow and Benford (Snow and Benford 2000) in her work studying the contestation of “spatial imaginaries” between the Brazilian state and rural workers (Wolford 2004). These spatial imaginaries where “cognitive frameworks both collective and individual, constituted through the lived experiences, perceptions, and conceptions of space itself” (409), play a significant role in movement formation. It could be argued that spatial imaginaries are not all that different from framing in general. However, the importance of *space* and *place* are concepts essentially unconsidered in existing framing methodologies. Overall, Wolford does an excellent job at conjoining the role of *space* and *place* in social movements more broadly, but also with significant attention to framing (Wolford 2004).

Looking at the interventions of Miller, Kurtz, and Wolford it becomes increasingly clear that core concepts in human geography have utility when used in conjunction with social movements theory. This section has attempted to exemplify the vitality, usefulness, and critiques found both within geography and social movements theory. Nevertheless, much of this literature review, especially the conflation of geographic precepts and social movement theory, can be

problematized. However, given the primacy of these theories and the growing scholarship attempting to graft them together, these currents in the study of social movements provide ample worth when considering the historical contexts of the Canadian Farm Workers Union and likely beyond. With this literature in mind, the next chapter presents the research methodology and data collection undertaken for this project.

### **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

As with many social science studies completed well before this project, interviews with key participants are seen as an imperative method to assist in answering (or possibly not answering) the research questions. This project relies on the use of semi-structured interviews with past union organisers and members. There were three main goals for the interviews: First to understand the specific strategies of how the CFU organised; Second to understand the specific challenges to organising agricultural labour generally and in the context of the CFU specifically; Lastly, to understand how the CFU was perceived, with an emphasis on its successes and failures. The use of semi-structured interviews was considered the most appropriate for this research project for several reasons.

The CFU and issues being examined are both historical and in their time a very sensitive topic directly connected to people's daily lives and challenges. Because of this, a semi-structured interview is most appropriate to allow participants to share their version of events in more nuanced and endogenous ways. A rigid structured interview would be less effective at garnering the subtleties and complexities of the CFU and individual's experiences. However, a completely unstructured interview would likely lead to the discussion spreading like water, where it would be much more difficult to delineate the specific strategies, challenges, and perceptions of the CFU from an amorphous discussion. In this case, the semi-structured interviews provided a key balance. This balance allowed for primary questions to be answered by all participants but also left space for discussion of new information that would otherwise not be garnered from the preconceived questions.

Why not a focus group? Individual interviews were necessary to visualise how different members and organisers perceived the movement. Focus groups could have led to far less

information overall as some participants would likely feel uncomfortable sharing their views in a group setting. Repetition would also potentially be a problem in a focus group if many individuals decide to simply echo each other's views. Considering these problems, a focus group could lead to a space where influence over other group members is possible. Logistically it would have been almost impossible to organise a focus group because the individuals contacted were geographically dispersed across the Lower Mainland in different communities. Finally, the time restraints on the actual project itself meant that a focus on more content rich semi-structured interviews was preferable. Ethics approval for the project was given to the primary researcher in October 2015. This gave time for a maximum of approximately four months to organise and carry out interviews. A more in-depth overview of the limitations of this research will be discussed at the end of this chapter. The specific interview design, method of establishing contact, procedure of interviews, and how interviews were analysed after completion will be broken down and discussed going forward.

### ***Interview Design***

The semi-structured interview (see Appendix A page 92) guide was developed prior to contact with individuals based on background research and consultation with the primary researcher's supervisory committee. Several major themes were established with major questions and subsequent minor questions. The specific interview guide can be found in Appendix A (page 92). The major themes were:

- The participant's involvement in the CFU or agriculture in the Lower Mainland.
- The participants' understanding of why there was a need to organise.
- The specific strategies the CFU employed and why these strategies were used.
- The kinds of challenges existed when the CFU was trying to organise.

- What organisations, groups, or individuals were important for the organising effort and why.

Again, it is important to note that because an *interview guide* was used, adaptations to questions or entirely new questions were developed on the fly by the primary researcher during interviews. These adapted questions revolved around specific stories or experiences that were shared in the interviews. All the participants had different roles or involvement with the CFU and the agriculture sector, leading to these deviations away from the preconceived questions. The next section discusses how participants were initially contacted.

### ***Contacting Participants***

Since this study focuses on understanding a historical period, initial participant identification was made by reviewing the CFU Chronology (Berggold 2015) where names of union organisers and members were scattered throughout various newspaper clippings. Also, initial participant identification drew on expertise from the University of the Fraser Valley's Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies (CICS). Once the first participant was identified the primary researcher initially contacted them by phone using a phone script to ask if the participant would be interested in taking part in an interview. Following first contact, the initial participant received an email with a formal letter designed to schedule an interview time and clearly detail their rights and welfare as a participant. There are some exceptions when only a phone number or only an email address was available. In these cases, whatever contact information that was available was used first.

The initial interview was extremely important for garnering additional contacts. Although potential participants could be identified by the earlier methods described, actual email addresses and phone numbers were obtained from the initial participant. Snowball sampling was suitable

and preferable in this study and was repeatedly used in subsequent interviews. In total 10 potential participants were contacted and six interviews were scheduled and completed. Two of the four participants who were contacted indicated they were not interested and two never replied to the researcher's request. The interview procedure is discussed in the next section.

### ***Interview Procedure***

Interviews were scheduled at a location and time that was preferable to the participant. Two of the interviews were conducted via Skype because of the geographic distance between the primary researcher and the participant. One interview was rescheduled to a phone interview at the last minute by the participant. Five of the six interviews were recorded with a digital-audio recorder, while one participant indicated they did not want to be recorded. With the participant's consent, detailed field notes during the interview were taken instead.

Upon arrival or start of the interview, the primary researcher engaged in off the record discussion about the research project, answered any questions the participants had, and ensured participants understood their rights and welfare and that they had given informed consent. Excluding these preliminary conversations recorded interviews lasted between 30 to 70 minutes. At the end of the interview, the interviewer inquired if participants had any suggestions for additional participants to contact. This general procedure was followed for all interviews.

### ***Analysis of Completed Interviews***

The first step in the analysis of interviews was transcription. All the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by the primary researcher using the programme pmTrans (The Poor

Man's Transcriber)<sup>1</sup>. This software uses a graphical user interface (GUI) and tools to allow audio playback alongside a simple text markup editor. The software allows for variable audio recording playback speed which assists in manually transcribing interviews more carefully. Interviews were transcribed at 50 percent playback speed for accuracy. Afterwards, the interviews were listened to at full speed to ensure no meaning, phrases, or names were lost in the 50 percent playback speed transcription. From pmTrans, the text was then exported to a Microsoft Word document where it was formatted for easier reading. Once all the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and compiled this way, the next phase of interview coding took place.

The purpose of coding was to both categorise and pull out key participant responses from the full transcription. Coding acts like a magnifying glass, honing in on the specific discovered qualitative data from the transcriptions. Initial coding was performed on physical printed copies of transcripts. Different coloured highlighters were used to represent different codes across each transcript. Each colour represented one of the following themes (reasons for organising, challenges to organising, organising strategies, and social movements versus trade union). In some cases, text was represented by more than one code. Once this initial by-hand transcription was complete, the interviews were then recoded digitally using NVivo 11 Starter<sup>2</sup>. The use of this software was multi-faceted. First and foremost, recoding interviews in NVivo provided ample space to reevaluate how appropriate the categories were and how accurately initial by-hand coding represented the text. Additionally, digital coding within NVivo allows for better

<sup>1</sup> pmTrans (The Poor Mans Transcriber) is an open source cross platform and portable software for interview transcriptions found here: <https://pmtrans.codeplex.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> NVivo 11 Starter is a qualitative analysis software suite produced by QSR International (<http://www.qsrinternational.com/product>).

aggregated data output of coded material. New documents were compiled using NVivo where each document represented one code and all the coded material across interviews. This was extremely important for more efficiently understanding how all participants had different or similar responses to interview questions. There may have been scope for further categories or sub-categories beyond the four established. However, because of the length of interviews and time constraints these four categories were more than sufficient for the scope of this project. Specific coded identities are listed in Appendix A on page 93.

### ***Limitations to Study***

This study is subject to many limitations. The positionality of the primary researcher can be recognised as a major limitation. Because the CFU and its inception occurred over 35 years ago the primary researcher was not alive and subsequently not present during any of its rich history. Additionally, the primary researcher is not part of the Lower Mainland's South Asian community in which much of the CFU's history is derived and endogenous to. In order to combat the historical nature, this project has always been approached as combating ahistorical representations of the CFU and South Asian immigrant societies. Many of the studies cited in the literature review examine past social movements in order to advance social movements theory. In this case, there is need to revisit an event in history where the historical context is lacking and underrepresented in contemporary discussions of agriculture in the Lower Mainland. In order to address the ethnic and community positionality of the primary researcher a partnership with CICS was established early on. This relationship provided access to cultural knowledge, community history, and contact information with participants. While these efforts do not completely negate the issue of researcher positionality, they effectively address these concerns in tangible ways.



The other primary limitation surrounds the key participants in the study. The six completed interviews represent key leadership, members involved with the CFU, and one former farmer. While these interviews provide significant insight it does not directly interface with former labourers (although all of the organisers and members had worked on farms at one point before pushing to organise). The focus is centred on how key leadership viewed historical events. There is the possibility that their views have changed significantly over time. While these individuals are a strong representation of the core leadership involved with organising it is still a small sample. Additionally, the two contacts who wished not to participate and the two who never responded could have provided valuable new information that was never acquired. Finally, several potential participants were identified but no contact information could be found to actually approach them. In one case, the incorrect contact information was shared with the researcher and was never able to be rectified. All of these challenges within the limitation of the key participants are difficult to overcome.

The largest caveat to the small sample size of participants is that this project had a limited time frame in which to organise and conduct interviews. Additionally, there is very little that can be done when participants choose not to participate, never reply, contact information is wrong or never made available. The key leadership, members, and solitary former farmer still provide meaningful contributions to understanding how the CFU was initiated and how it was perceived. All of these individuals had a stake in the movement and all of them remained involved with the CFU for several years, most importantly during its rise, peak, and decline. Their views may have changed but they may not have changed. Either possibility is difficult to prove. Regardless, given their vital involvement in the CFU and relationships to labourers, their understanding of the movement is still essential in the discussion and questions asked in this project.

As evidenced above, there are significant limitations to this study. Particularly the positionality of the primary researcher and the final makeup of the participants interviewed. It would be unique if a qualitative analysis at this level did not have some recognisable challenges. This section has demonstrated the context of these limitations and how they came about and also what makes the study still inherently useful for answering the research questions set out. Despite these limitations, the strength of participant knowledge will be important to remember as this methodology section comes to a close and primary discussion begins.

## CHAPTER IV: CFU CORE ORGANISING AND THE FRAMING PERSPECTIVE

We immigrants who till the soil and harvest the crops of Canada came to this country because we believed it would be a land of opportunity, justice and equality. We came here with great dreams. We have seen the seeds of those dreams grow into a bitter, bitter harvest. A harvest of discrimination, a harvest of poverty, a harvest of sickness, a harvest of death. (Human Rights Commission of British Columbia 1983).

The above quotation in many respects summarises the position of the CFU and how they chose to frame the issues and conditions they persuasively fought to change. This discussion examines the key ways in which the CFU framed issues will be examined. These frames were both diagnostic and prognostic. The CFU used these frames to challenge the power relations of farmers, labour contractors, and legislative authority issued by the state. Furthermore, these frames confronted the commonplace xenophobic attitudes towards South Asian immigrant farm labourers. Frames drew in support and resources from outside of the aggrieved community of farmworkers. In order to give the framing perspective clarity and context, this discussion will be broken down into two categories. Diagnostic frames will be discussed first by looking at the key reasons for organising and what problems motivated individuals to action. Secondly, prognostic frames and resource mobilisation will be addressed by looking at the strategies of the CFU as an organisation. The discussion draws on the empirical data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. These interviews provide the opportunity for participants to re-engage with the history of the CFU and their experiences during its infancy, growth, peak, and decline.

### ***The Diagnostic Frame: Reasons for Organising and Sharing the Problem***

In April of 1979, the Farmworkers Organising Committee (FWOC) met for the first time and started establishing what would eventually become the CFU. The FWOC was comprised of a

group of male farm labourers and concerned individuals who wanted to bring a public voice to the farmworkers' struggle in BC. In their first year, they were able to sign up over 700 members. There was no single axiomatic reason for organising farmworkers in the Lower Mainland. The reasons were complex and heterogeneous moving across the agriculture sector and the many linkages to power and where it was situated. The common discourses of agriculture in BC insulated the industry from any sort of external critique for some time.

Very little has been written on the discourses of agriculture in BC with the exception of David Demeritt's *Visions of Agriculture in British Columbia*. Demeritt encapsulated how aggrandising agrarian and country life discourses shaped what knowledge was produced and ultimately what was thought to be true of agricultural landscapes in BC (Demeritt 1995). In short, Demeritt argues that agriculture in BC was seen as picturesque where the farmer and his family are central characters in a very respectable and honest profession. There was a problem, a problem with labour that very few people recognised as it was cloaked under these novel interpretations of agriculture in BC. Spaces of farming in BC can be seen as "ghost acreages" or the "disembodied nature of commodity spaces as shapeless, people-less forms without environmental histories or geographies (Bridge 2001). The readiness of key leaders who had heard many complaints from farmworkers started the process of developing some way to share the problem with wider publics. The following discussion focuses on the development of the diagnostic frame whereby the CFU was able to identify the problem, give it attributes, and build a consensus of recognition.

The perceptions of agricultural labour and legal discrimination were at the forefront of the diagnostic frame of the CFU. Calvin Sandborn wrote a Master's thesis focused on the

legislative discrimination against “East Indians” in British Columbia. In his opening paragraph Sandborn (1980) wrote:

As anyone who follows bathroom graffiti is well aware, the current ‘niggers’ of British Columbia are East Indians. Our society seems to have a perennial need for scapegoats, and East Indians are the current era’s nominee. They are castigated for having accented speech, different cultural and religious values, and different cuisine. When the economy slows down, they are cited as the root cause of high unemployment. There have been numerous incidents in recent years where East Indians have been beaten up on the streets and terrorized in their homes, simply because of the colour of their skin (1980, 1).

Beyond this sharp introduction, Sandborn took stock of the “legally institutionalised racism” that had unfolded in Canada with specific attention on how the highly racialized employment sectors had no legal protection (Sandborn 1980, 29). The recognition of larger systemic problems and cumulative effects on workers was the principal diagnostic frame from which many of the CFU’s reasons for organising came from. A key organiser painted a similar picture as Sandborn stating that:

[...] the government of the time, regardless of who they were, they were just going along with the idea of ‘oh yeah you know like it’s just a secondary job, not a job that you would need to make a living.’ So there were no laws, farmworkers were not deemed workers (Organiser 1).

The challenge presented itself that from the start these workers had very little political clout or recourse when they had an issue at work. The lack of legal recourse was emphasised multiple times when speaking with former union organisers and members:

They received no compensation if they were injured, they were outside of the legal regime of worker's compensation. If a worker had a claim they had to go into civil court, things like that (Organiser 1).

The workers had to sue the employer to get some kind of compensation. I mean very few workers could afford the money to sue which meant that basically if they were injured 'tough luck' (Organiser 2).

Throughout conversations with different union organisers and members it was consistently repeated that farmworkers were seen as an "afterthought" and in their position, it was almost impossible to get meaningful change. One organiser said that the term discrimination was key affirming that "because previously farmworkers didn't have any coverage, they were sort of – the words we used were discriminated against" (Organiser 1). The CFU membership felt that there was a need to spread the word that this was not just a few grievances or isolated incidents, but a widespread problem that stretched across many farms in the Lower Mainland and even in Canada as a whole. The CFU's initial role was described by one union organiser as "...primarily to publicise, to show how badly treated the workers [were], there was little protection" (Organiser 2). This was reiterated throughout all of the interviews with union organisers and members. The first battle to be fought was to expose the issues at hand and see what support they could gain. But in order to solidify these large claims of discrimination and exploitation the CFU needed to demonstrate and articulate the specific grievances in question (See Table 1 page 39). Issues highlighted in Table 1 were repetitively mentioned in interviews, archival materials, and in some academic literature. These examples of issues were part of the diagnostic frame, going beyond simply stating the major issues but atomising the specific grievances that were the outcome of a class of workers existing outside of the legal regime. These grievances are what drove the desire for collective action as noted by two different organisers:

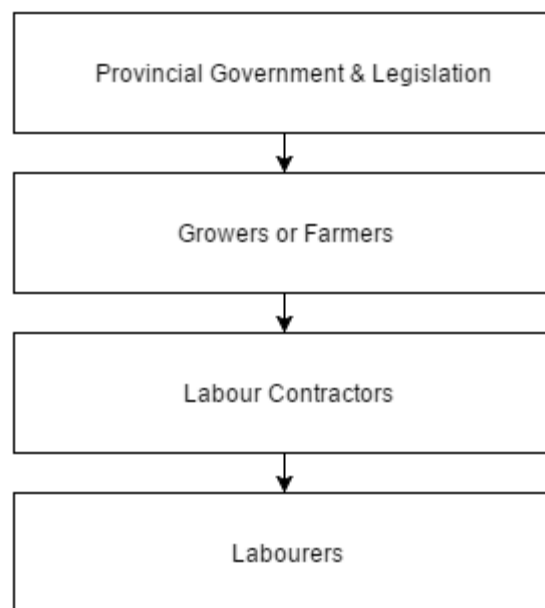
We felt the situation was intolerable, you know you really felt that something needed to be done and you know from that perspective we set up a committee called the FWOOC (Organiser 2).

So when you look at that – you see people working in the fields and see the kind of exploitation going on, there was no way any person who was concerned could just you know close your eyes and walk away. I could not do it (Organiser 1).

<b>Grievance</b>	<b>As Described by Participant</b>
Gender and Age	“In the seasonal, in the summertime the majority of workers I believe were primarily women and elderly” (Organiser 1).
Piece Rate System and Labour Contractors	“...and one of the big issues for picker was if you’re on the piece rate system picking crops you would fill up your pale and bring it to be weighed and the scales might not be accurately set so you could be short changed by the labour contractor that way” (Staff Member 1).
Wages	“First of all, not getting paid in a timely manner and secondly you know... being paid low wages, long hours, and many times not getting paid at all. (Staff Member 1).
Transportation to and from Work	“They would just you know remove the seats and no seat belts no nothing. They’d just jam them into you know 13 seater Econoline vans they put 25 people” (Organiser 1).
Working Conditions in the Fields	“Go to work you know no running water, no toilets, not handwashing facilities, nothing of that sort” (Organiser 2).
Housing of Seasonal Workers	“...they would just put 2x4’s and you know piece of plywood on top of that and they’d just convert poultry farms into some kind of 4x8 shacks. They were really really tiny...they just stay there because they were from the interior” (Organiser 1).

**Table 1: Example of specific grievance identification in interviews.**

These grievances could be studied in detail to discover if they were representative of the whole region. However, the focus in this thesis is that grievances were used as part of the CFU's diagnostic frame to draw in wider support. The conflict between labourer and contractor can be used as one example. The labourers themselves had very little agency in attempting to solve these grievances. Figure 1 illustrates very simplistically the layers of hierarchy from labourer to provincial governance. Labour contractors acted as a significant barrier in this hierarchy allowing for workers' concerns to remain hidden from the public. Many workers are considered employees of licenced labour contractors, not the farmers themselves. This meant that contractors were responsible for transporting and paying workers' wages (FVFLSP 1982, 4-5; CFU 1992, 5). However, abuses such as failure to pay wages, unsafe transportation, unchecked unlicensed contracting, and unfair firing of farmworkers were identified by the CFU as major flaws with this system (FWOC, 1980 15-17). The ability for farm labourers to even begin to challenge the legislative matters was deeply restricted.



**Figure 1:** The hierarchy of farmworkers and control.



A former organiser specified that because labourers’ “work life was so difficult... it was impossible for them to go to school to learn English” (Organiser 2). Without English proficiency labourers would not have any ability to articulate their concerns to anyone but their labour contractor and they had very little knowledge of what their rights were in the first place. Participants identified that most farmworkers were new immigrants and this put them in a precarious position, not wanting to go against the labour contractor who provided them with their first job in the country. The CFU reported that the labour contractor is a “powerful middle person” taking anywhere from 25-40% of farmworkers earnings for transportation and housing fees (CFU 1983, 6). These power relations meant issues rarely transcended labourer to labour contractor relations. This kind of discussion around a particular grievance and what little agency a labourer had was used to show how farm workers were being exploited and why they needed greater support. They simply could not do it alone without some kind of advocate. The CFU saw their position as the key advocate.

The diagnostic frame was a direct response to how few people knew about farmworkers’ issues, despite their occurrence in Lower Mainland. One former union staff member discussed how the broader public in BC responded to their initial efforts:

[...] you know people were shocked and surprised that Canada had this legacy. I don’t think they – they always assumed these issues were somewhere else, child labour, children dying in the fields, no rights for health and safety, exposure to pesticides, unfair laws or hiring, living in poverty, no minimum wage, I mean you can go on and on (Staff Member 1).

Some specific mediums proved to be essential in getting the message out and visible. These mediums, although strategies, are more akin to the diagnostic frame than the prognostic frame

which is why they are briefly mentioned next. These mediums are focused on sharing the problem rather than identifying a solution or what needs to be done.

Perhaps the most poignant and lasting medium for the diagnostic frame was photography. The pervasive understanding of BC's picturesque agriculture needed to be shattered in order to really share the problems with broader publics. By commissioning photographs of working conditions in specifically the Fraser Valley, the CFU hoped to evoke emotions out of viewers and demonstrate the reality of the working conditions. One staff member who took the initial photographs commented on the process:

[...] because I had been a picker and I had been a farm worker I knew I had to get physically close to them, I knew I couldn't stand back. I knew that the work was – you had to bend over all day and in order to capture that like if you standing up and taking a wide shot you can't really capture that. So I was very, very interested in being very close to the workers when I took the photos [...] Those images - those first documentary images were then used in multiple union stuff and then distributed as well to newspapers and that kind of stuff (Staff Member 1).

Besides photographs, as the quotation above alludes to, other media such as newsprint and union flyers were also an essential part of spreading the message. While traditional news media was important as the organising effort gained more and more coverage, the CFU developed its own newspaper *The Farmworker*<sup>3</sup>, a bilingual English-Punjabi production. This was put in place to avoid journalistic bias or hemming of their message to the farmworker's community, a primarily Punjabi literate readership. Besides the newspaper, various theatre productions were produced,

<sup>3</sup> *The Farmworker Issue No. 1*: [http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu\\_2/id/3892](http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/3892)

such as *A Crop of Poison*<sup>4</sup> which was a story of pesticides, health, and safety issues in the Fraser Valley. Photographs, exhibits, posters, flyers, special focus newspapers, theatre productions, all of these mediums acted as different tools in which the diagnostic frame was projected to share the struggles of farmworkers across the Lower Mainland.

Much of the literature on framing analysis focuses on the assignment of blame. This project has focused on the diagnostic frame as sharing the problem, not just how groups assign blame. The CFU did assign blame through their diagnostic frame. This manifested as a focus on the blaming of government for the lack of adequate legislative protection for farmworkers, which left room for the exploitive behavior of labour contractors to go unchecked. The CFU's diagnostic frame chastised the provincial government, farmers, and contractors in different written reports, demonstrations, news articles, rallies, and public meetings. However, they also were focused on challenging the construction of knowledge regarding both the South Asian community and farmworkers in general. The CFU's diagnostic frame was sharing new narratives to counter the prevailing perceptions of the agricultural landscapes of the Lower Mainland. By framing issues as racist discrimination, the CFU attempted to show how farmworkers were people who were unjustly discriminated against and who deserved equal rights. This diagnostic frame however, was coupled with the prognostic frame whereby the CFU started to establish their concrete agenda. A mantra of what solutions needed to happen and how it was going to get done. The next section deals with the prognostic frame of the CFU and specifically the strategies that went beyond challenging assumptions or sharing the problem but focused on changing the structures creating problems in the first place.

<sup>4</sup> *A Crop of Poison Play*: [http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/compoundobject/collection/cfu\\_2/id/4769/rec/18](http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/compoundobject/collection/cfu_2/id/4769/rec/18)

### ***The Prognostic Frame: Strategies of Organising and Stating Solutions***

The diagnostic frame of the CFU was principally focused on exposing injustice and exploitation. Conversely, the prognostic frame employed by the CFU had both abolitionist and revisionist tendencies that evolved over the course of the organising effort. The prognostic frame is slightly more complex, as proposed solutions to problems and strategies were much more dependent on what was seen as actually achievable by the CFU's core membership. These proposed solutions and strategies were also dependent on what actual resources the CFU had. These resources were mobilised from the dense networks of support that had been garnered by the combined utility of the diagnostic and prognostic spread of the CFU's message. This discussion will first take stock of these networks of support and what resources the CFU had gained. Secondly, the specific strategies the CFU used to accomplish their goals will be identified.

The CFU had gained a lot of support in the early organising efforts of the FWOC and the first years of the official CFU. According to several of the former organisers, the most prominent strongholds of support in terms of both solidarity and financial donations were other unions in Canada or BC. One former member highlighted the initial support they earned with specific reference to start-up funding:

The Canadian Labour Congress was one of the first organisations that actually gave some sort of monetary contribution to the organising effort... the initial check was something like \$40,000. The Canadian Union of Public Employees kind of contributed something like \$10,000. The BC Government Employment Union contributed \$10,000. So I mean all together \$60,000 that was a lot – a considerable amount of money for these volunteers who were trying to organise farmworkers (Organiser 2).

Besides the trade unions mentioned above, other participants identified the International Woodworkers of America, The Postal Workers Union, the BC Teachers Union, and the United Church of Canada as groups who supported the CFU. Oxfam Canada also provided an initial grant of “approximately \$2000 for the organisers which led to the initial photographs of working conditions” (Staff Member 1). Prior to the CFU’s start, in 1962, the United Farmworkers of America (UFW) had been organising farmworkers in California with widespread international news coverage (UFW 2016). In 1983, UFW founding President Cesar Chavez visited Vancouver and led a rally with the CFU in an act of solidarity for their cause. Besides these more well-known groups or individuals, participants indicated that many other small donations were made by individuals in the community during fundraisers and rallies. With all of the support, the CFU established particular strategies that evolved in order to redress the issues they identified. These can be broken down into three main groups: community organising, traditional union formation, and legislative change. Using specific examples and elaborations from the interview process these encompassing strategies can be taken up as part of the prognostic frame.

#### *Community Organising: English as a Second Language*

Community organising and community support was apparent in the interviews and in some cases was mentioned very specifically. For example, when discussing the key strategies of the CFU one former staff member described community organising:

There was another strategy – it started, we kind of tiptoed around a bit – and because our approach was community organising. We were constantly working with other organisations, service organisations and using that approach with our union or membership. So we tried things like English as Second Language (Staff Member 2).

Starting community organising involved the creation and circulation of the CFU newspaper, rallies open to the public, and fundraisers. Most of the participants commented on the CFU's desire to provide services to farmworkers, which is not untypical of any union. However, the development of an English as a Second Language (ESL) programme was the most direct and thought out strategy continually referenced in interviews. According to one participant, the desire to learn English was a "common emphasis from farmworkers themselves" (Staff Member 1). In order to create a viable ESL programme and gain funding, the programme was funnelled through a newly created community organisation called the Deol Agricultural Education and Research Society (DAERS), which was backed by the CFU. DAERS continually applied for and received funding in order to carry out theatre productions, pesticide control campaigns, skills training, and the ESL programme (DAERS 1987). By going through this organisation, the CFU was able to mobilise resources and gain funding that may have otherwise been difficult to obtain as a union. This was paramount for getting the ESL programme established as well as other projects that went beyond the fields in terms of providing services to farmworkers or engaging the community.

The CFU saw learning English as an essential step towards recalibrating the power relations between farmworker and contractor. One former staff explained this by stating that:

[...] and one of the big issues for pickers was if you're on the piece rate system picking crops you would fill up your pail and bring it to be weighed and the scales might be not set accurately so you could be shortchanged by the labour contractor in those ways. And so those were the types of things that because of the contractors and farmer might be an English person – speaking English – we tried to teach the farm workers how to use words in English about making sure they were paid properly (Staff Member 1).

This was a central part of the CFU's prognostic frame but was also a dilemma. Several former organisers stated that the major position of the CFU was that the contract labour system had to be abolished and that there should be a minimum wage to ensure workers were paid fairly.

However, this proved to be difficult so the development of an ESL programme was one way in which to at the very least mitigate some issues between farmworker and contractor. The ESL programme from the beginning was focused on what the CFU thought needed to be done to improve working conditions and relations between workers and contractors.

Former organisers and members commented on how this programme was developed differently with a union emphasis. One former staff member spoke at length describing the nature of the ESL programme:

So the big thing the ESL programme, what made it different was, it was based on the literacy programme that were Sandinistas in Nicaragua – which was take the schooling to the people type of thing, rather than making the people come to the school, take the schooling right to where the people are. And so what the ESL program that the CFU developed was in the farmworkers houses [...] But again, what happened was the union saw an opportunity here to provide a service, which was to teach English, but also as a way to spread their union message [...] when we started the ESL curriculum and when it was laid out, the first lesson plans were around working conditions, so health and safety. Like, are you exposed to pesticides? – so it was all related to unions rhetoric and their – their issues, their campaigns that they were involved in at the time (Staff Member 1).

However, the ESL programme began to foster a cross cultural experience, breaking down the barriers of race between ESL teachers and the South Asian community wanting to learn English. This experience was somewhat unexpected but proved to be very valuable:

The teachers were recruited by – through initiatives in the BC Teacher’s Federation. So many of the teachers that were teaching English were union members for the teacher’s federation that were doing it as an act of solidarity. They had been recruited, or they might be a grad student studying ESL. But they were always, almost always Canadians. It was also kind of a bit of a cross cultural experience, like the teachers were going into the houses of the South Asian community and so you had kind of that cross cultural flow thing happening as well between the different cultures. And you’re teaching it as an adult literacy right, because they’re elders and they’re older and you’re teaching them in their home, and they’re cooking, and they have their children with them at the same time (Staff Member 1).

The ESL programme also changed over time, as workers themselves began to ask for different approaches. This was explained by one former staff member stating that farmworkers wanted to “learn how to catch the bus” or “how to go shopping” (Staff Member 1). So eventually the ESL programme evolved with different lesson plan iterations. What was so important was that the ESL programme became focused on what the farmworkers’ needs were in the community, not just union rhetoric. The ESL programme is indicative of community organising as a strategy employed by the CFU to engage in multiple solutions to the problems of exploitation and discrimination. The ESL programme first sought to mitigate the level of power contractors were able to exert over farmworkers who could not speak English. Getting paid properly and workplace safety issues were two central issues the CFU wanted to solve. It attempted to both educate workers on their basic rights but also give them the discursive tools necessary to make their voice heard. This unique trajectory of the ESL programme is representative of the prognostic frame dynamic. The CFU recognised that solutions to the struggles of farmworkers’ had to exist both in the fields and in the community. The ESL programme in some ways did both, first operating with a union positionality and then adapting to the farmworkers desired



learning outcomes. Another way the CFU tried to address the needs of workers and workplace issues directly were traditional union organising methods. This seems inherent to an organisation called a union but was clearly only one part of the CFU as a whole.

### *Traditional Union Organising: Full Time/Year Round Farmworkers*

Because the majority of farm work in the Lower Mainland was seasonal, it was incredibly difficult to form any kind of traditional union structure. The challenges that went along with traditional union organisation will be discussed later in greater detail, but it is important to note that much of the traditional union organisation the CFU attempted was centred on a small contingent of full-time year-round workers in operations such as mushroom farms, canneries, and nurseries. This traditional organising was much different than the community organising coming out of the CFU. Here traditional organising can be defined by two major elements: (1) Certification and Collective Bargaining; and (2) Collection of Union Dues. In the interviews very little was discussed in reference to certifications or the collection of union dues. This makes discussing traditional organisation within the CFU much more challenging. Nevertheless, this discussion will very briefly look at how traditional organising was still a strategy employed by the CFU. Much of the discussion in this thesis relies on the CFU chronology, archive, and what little connections can be made between these records and interviews.

The CFU had a significant shift in strategy when it came to organising. This shift was identified briefly in a comprehensive report published in 1983. The report stated that:

A shift in resources took place to concentrate on year round units in order to establish a financial base rather than seasonal organising (CFU 1983, 43).

Two former organisers noted that they felt it was not appropriate to charge seasonal workers union dues. This helps explain why there was a shift towards certifications and year-round workers. The CFU received its first official certification on July 18th of 1980 at Jensen's Mushroom Farm (CFU 1980a). Certifications only granted the CFU the right to act as the bargaining agent for particular units of workers on a farm by farm basis. From 1980 until 1997 the CFU had earned six certifications and two collective agreements in total (Berggold 2015, Jensen 2014). As a strategy, traditional organisation was never explicitly linked to any clear part of the prognostic frame by any of the participants. There was a disconnect in the data this way as far less discussion revolved around how traditional organising was carried out or if it was successful. While traditional union organisation was attempted at multiple farms, participants often focused on the other strategies the CFU employed outside of the traditional union formation period. For example, the ESL programme became very clearly a distinct part of the community organising strategy, while any discussion of certifications and collective bargaining had no obvious link to a clear desired outcome. This was likely because of the challenges traditional organising met, which will be discussed in the next chapter more explicitly.

Much of the certification process led to protracted struggles between striking labourers and growers either before the certification process or after during collective bargaining. One former organiser explained that in the end, "union dues coming out of those certifications didn't bring very much money in" (Staff Member 2). Eventually in time, it became impossible to maintain certifications. Decertification's crippled any chance of continued traditional union formation. The leadership of the CFU addressed the issue of union organising in an executive report writing that:

In terms of actually organizing of the unorganized farms, the problem is twofold. One with the SOCRED [Social Credit Party] Government's anti-union legislation it is very hard to keep a farm organised because of easy decertification and second the C.F.U does not have enough funding to hire full time organisers who will work only in the fields to organize (CFU 1991a, 10-11).

It is arguably for lack of the union's success that participants were less likely to discuss traditional organising with more concrete articulation of how it was a strategy or a solution. The push for an official union and meaningful collective bargaining was a hopeful strategy or plan of attack for the CFU. However, despite it being part of the prognostic frame it was largely unsuccessful. In light of these challenges, the CFU focused heavily on pushing for legislative change throughout its history. Again, the notion of legislative discrimination has been prevalent throughout the CFU's diagnostic and prognostic frame. How the CFU aimed to make legislative change happen will be surveyed as the final core part of the prognostic frame.

#### *Legislative Change: Recognising Workers Under the Law*

Jensen (2014) published an article that comprehensively reviewed the historical legislative exclusion of agricultural workers in BC from 1937-1975. She demonstrated the dichotomous nature of new labour legislation in BC that continually claimed to advance labour code by recognising all sectors of unionisation and collective bargaining but still excluded agricultural workers (Jensen 2014). It was not until 1975 that agricultural workers were even recognised in the *Labour Code*, allowing them to at the very least attempt to unionise and achieve collective bargaining. Despite this inclusion, it did not address "statutory protections for minimum wages, hours of work, and hazardous working conditions" (Jensen 2014, 94). The only shortcoming of Jensen's work is that it did not have space to interrogate social movements

versus unions in this dichotomous legal apparatus. Fleetingly but not unimportantly Jensen (2014) recognised this struggle:

The legislation also structures bargaining on an enterprise level, rather than on a regional or sectoral basis. As a result, the legalized labour relations regime does not easily comprehend a broader societal mobilization for greater equality and human dignity of seasonal agricultural workers. It also requires that unions structure themselves as responsible and bureaucratic organizations which act through legal channels rather than direct action (2014, 94).

This gap in protection for workers as well as the slumberous pace at which the provincial government included agricultural workers in any kind of labour legislation was a key target of the CFU's prognostic frame and arguably one of the most consistent parts of their organising after their initial formation.

All of the former organisers and members in the interviews identified the significance of pressuring the government to make legislative change that would include farmworkers. This was seen as a major success of the CFU. One former staff member described pressuring the government:

It was public awareness; it was pressuring the government. Actually, the strongest thing was the focus on pressuring the government to bring in legislative rights for farmworkers under worker's compensation and under the employment standards act. We kept the focus on pressure on government and public awareness. Those two went hand in hand until we were successful at getting workers' compensation coverage and employment standards (Staff Member 2).

This, however, was a long road of consistent demonstrations, drafting of reports, and lobbying the government to get these changes. In 1980, the provincial government announced a new *Employment Standards Act* that included Agricultural Workers. The CFU saw this as a weak

placation as workers were still “...excluded from health and safety regulations and many employment standards like minimum wage, hours of work and overtime.” (CFU 1983, 17). On April 4<sup>th</sup> 1983, BC’s Workers Compensation Board (WCB) announced that all agricultural workers would be covered. This was short lived as only a few weeks later the BC Cabinet intervened and stopped the proposed changes (CFU 1983). The legislative exclusion of agricultural workers remained persistent during the time of the CFU. It was not until April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1993 that agricultural workers were finally included under health and safety regulations (Berggold 2015).

The CFU introduced different of strategies to try and get legislative action. Table 2 (page 56) lists and briefly describes notable events in the CFU history where legislation issues were addressed directly in some way. Strategies included rallies and demonstrations for legislative change, public hearings, briefing reports being submitted to the government, direct letters of complaint to the government, and participating in legislative forums. In terms of stating solutions and utilising strategies, legislative change was continually referenced by the CFU. But as one former member put it, “None of us were lawyers.” This lack of legal expertise meant that lawyers were important to the process of the CFU. One former staff member discussed the need to obtain legal assistance at great length:

We had these amazing lawyers, who were giving all their time for free. Labour lawyers. We could not have become a union and we could not have probably got any of that stuff without those lawyers. They were so central. None of us were lawyers. They were down at the LRB so much. Especially with these small certifications and other stuff going on - let alone all the demonstrations we had running into to cops (Staff Member 2).

The same member indicated that they felt the lawyers got very little recognition for how important they were to the CFU throughout its organising efforts. This was represented in the interviews themselves. Despite all of the former organisers and members highlighting the significance the CFU had in changing legislation, only one member commented on the substantive role lawyers played in advising the union on all their efforts. Nevertheless, legislative change and strategies around achieving actual and equal recognition of farmworkers under the law was an essential part of the CFU's prognostic frame based on both the interviews and the CFU's dense historical record.

### ***Summary of the Prognostic and Diagnostic Frame***

It is difficult to avoid conflation of the diagnostic and prognostic frame when considering the CFU's history; the diagnostic and the prognostic frames that the CFU engaged in often coalesced when discussing the CFU with former organisers and members. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the CFU's original diagnostic frame held true throughout the movement to expose, capture, reiterate, and share the working conditions of farmworkers in BC in a new way that challenged common discourses and knowledge of farmworkers. They proselytised this message and garnered significant widespread appeal to various groups and broader publics. With this support and a peak in resources, the CFU undertook a dynamic prognostic frame where they both stated their solutions and developed strategies to start enacting change. Through community organising, traditional union formation, and legislative change, the CFU created a collective political agenda for farmworkers. In short, this was a desired political system that saw farmworkers as equal to all other workers under the law, an absence of the class of labour contractors, and an end to the racial stigma put on these primarily immigrant workers. This coupling of the diagnostic and prognostic frame was pivotal in allowing the CFU to function in a

way that challenged the diversity of issues at the time. With a slight opening in the law in 1975 for collective bargaining amongst agricultural workers, the widespread appeal of the CFU's movement to broader publics, sustained resources for several years, and then with an active leadership core, the CFU was able to organise agricultural workers like never before in Canada. This was a new threshold of collective action for farmworkers in BC. But it was not without its challenges.

Despite the success and utility of framing, the CFU had challenges that in many cases turned into defeats to both framing and sustained organisation. Framing was also engaged by others who did not recognise or agree with what the CFU was conveying. Some of these challenges have started to become apparent in the discussion of the diagnostic and prognostic frame. However, a more explicit recognition and analysis of these challenges are needed. The next chapter discusses the key themes of opposition the CFU faced: the counter-frame, structural constraints to organising, and community constraints to organising.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Description</b>
1980	FWOC Initial Brief to Hon. Jack Heinrich – Minister of Labour <sup>1</sup>	A substantive report demonstrating the working and living conditions of farmworkers who are excluded from the legal regime of labour protection.
1980	Health and Safety Public Meeting <sup>2</sup>	250 workers meet after an infant and three children die as a result of poor living conditions and lack of day-care for farmworkers.
1982	Letter of Protest Addressed to Robert McClelland – Minister of Labour <sup>3</sup>	CFU asks for action on the allegations of cabinet Minister James Hewitt threatening government interference in the WCB hearings over farmworker's health and safety.
1983	CFU Letter of Complaint Addressed to BC Cabinet <sup>4</sup>	CFU's official response to the intervention of the BC Cabinet in preventing the WCB from going forward with compensation inclusion for farmworkers.
1983	Public Demonstrations for Legislative Change <sup>5</sup>	CFU hosts a rally objecting to BC Cabinet's interference in the WCB. Two different demonstrations were held (one in Vancouver, another in front of the WCB offices).
1984	CFU Brief Addressed to Ken Rob – Workers Compensation Board <sup>6</sup>	A six-page report issued to the WCB for public hearings discussing coverage of farmworkers under health and safety.
1987	Report on Farmworkers Health and Safety Addressed to BC Labour Minister <sup>7</sup>	A comprehensive report outlining injuries, health inspections, and specific failures of government to respond to these incidents.
<p>1 <a href="http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/205">http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/205</a>; 2 <a href="http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/4187">http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/4187</a>; 3 <a href="http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/2705">http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/2705</a>; 4 <a href="http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/4215">http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/4215</a>; 5 <a href="http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/71">http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/71</a> and <a href="http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/3123">http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/3123</a>; 6 <a href="http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/447">http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/447</a>; 7 <a href="http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/5556">http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/5556</a>.</p>		

**Table 2:** Key CFU events focused on legislative change – compiled from CFU Chronology and Archival Documents (Berggold 2015)



## CHAPTER V: THE COUNTER-FRAME AND CHALLENGES TO ORGANISING

As alluded to in the earlier discussions of the diagnostic and prognostic frame, the CFU faced significant challenges. This section focuses on three primary discussions of challenges that were strongly represented in the interviews. Firstly, the counter-movement or counter-framing that occurred during the movement was substantial in positioning opposing ideas and arguments against the CFU. Secondly, significant structural challenges often sidelined the CFU from enacting meaningful change. Finally, strife existing internally to the South Asian community played a noteworthy role in stymieing the CFU in the long run of organising a primarily South Asian group of workers. These challenges are again based on the interview process and borrowed some elements from the CFU archive.

### ***The Counter-Frame and Counter Organising***

Counter-framing has been defined as “to rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person's or group's myths, versions of reality, or interpretive framework” (Snow and Benford 2000, 626). This definition of counter-framing fits well to explore the challenges that the CFU faced. In interviews, the former organisers and members highlighted several specific instances where their own frame was challenged. Additionally, a different context on farmer and labour contractor relations was highlighted by the former farmer interviewed. The most ardent counter-frame came initially from farmers or growers. All of the interviews had indicated that the presence of a union was upsetting to several farmers or growers in BC. One former organiser discussed farmers who spoke out in news media:

[...] some of the farmers being interviewed and expressing their unhappiness at this development. Some of them were coming up with the argument. Farmworkers would organise they will be asking higher wages and it would be reflected in the

price of the produce and so on. I mean they were coming up with those kind of arguments. The contractors - again they didn't like it (Organiser 1).

Another discussion that was commonly used by farmers or growers was countering any kind of union by increasing mechanisation of production. One former organiser explained their position:

Some of the farmers were saying well you know we're going to get rid of the farmworkers and bring in machines. Even if you bring in machines, machines don't operate themselves - you still need someone to operate them. Mechanisation has taken place and will continue to take place but you know there was of course, from the employers and the farmers the initial reaction was if these guys organise and ask for the higher wages we're going to bring in machines. And you know those kind(s) of facts (Organiser 2).

All of the former organisers and members reiterated that farmers, growers, and labour contractors sustained these arguments. This was to try and discourage the government and farmworkers from supporting a union formation. These primary arguments of the counter-frame acted as a rebutting or neutralisation of the CFU's diagnostic and prognostic frames. These contrasting positionalities between the CFU and those against the mobilisation of farmworkers demonstrate how different frames evolve together. Regardless of whose perspective was 'right' or 'wrong' these negotiations of the spaces of agricultural production were highly contested.

Some participants commented on how the provincial government did not always directly counter-frame the movement, but rather undermined it by not acting altogether. One former organiser felt that the government continually saved face by saying they were concerned about farmworkers safety but never actually acted on it:

Every time something that happens the government position is 'oh yeah we are really concerned.' But how? You have to make sure that you have proper

enforcement mechanism in the field on the roads and you know during the season and after (Organiser 1).

This is best understood when considering how slow the government was to respond to the CFU in actually including farmworkers in health and safety legislation. There was a 14-year period between the formation of the FWO in 1979 and the inclusion of farmworkers under health and safety legislation in 1993. Farmworkers in BC had tried to organise and demand better rights long before the FWO through work stoppages and protests as early as 1928 (Jensen 2014). Fraser Valley farmworkers in the 1930's were holding strikes demanding better pay, an elimination of the labour contract system, and better working conditions (Jensen 2014). There is a long lineage of farmworkers being dissatisfied with the provincial government's role in worker protections. This sort of governmentality counter-frame is elusive. The government's position on the issues seemed clear, in this case, the acknowledgment of needed protection for farmworkers, but the actual response from government was different. Governmentality draws on the many actors and decision makers. It is more heterogeneous than the voices of growers, farmers, or contractors. This is why it is difficult to nail down how the government possibly created a counter-frame to the CFU. Yet in the interviews there was always the sense from participants that behind closed doors there was motivation to ignore or refute the CFU's diagnostic and prognostic frames or rather to refute their recognition of the problems and their proposed solutions. Former organisers and members explained this as the inherent racism and discrimination against farmworkers.

In light of all of the counter-framing ideas discussed, the lone interview with a former farmer revealed an alternative less aggressive counter-frame. One major argument was that farmers were not always aligned with contractors. The former farmer indicated they had chosen

not to deal with contractors altogether because they were generally “unreliable” and “untrustworthy” thus challenging the notion of an alliance between farmers, growers, and contractors against the CFU (Farmer 1). He also indicated that on their farm they worked harder to provide better conditions which resulted in having none of their workers considering unionisation (Farmer 1), which was a direct challenge to the CFU’s prognostic and diagnostic frame. Again, without further validation from more farmers during that time, it is difficult to weigh this as a powerful counter-frame versus an isolated case. One former organiser did indicate that the CFU cooperated with a contractor; again further giving credence to the idea that in some cases the CFU’s actions were flexible within the social structures of labour. This former organiser described the instance in detail:

But there was one situation where we cooperated with a contractor. He hadn't been paid by a farmer you know - it was something like 70 to 80 thousand. You know a huge sum of money. And of course he wasn't paying workers and we went to him and said 'look why aren't you paying your workers' and he said 'look, how can I pay I have not been paid by the farmer?' And - at the worker's insistence - we put up a picket line at the farm. And this was you know right in the season of picking berries where farmers are busy and farmworkers are busy. We were extremely successful; the same day a cheque was cut...that was an isolated situation (Organiser 2).

These few examples provide an interesting look at the counter-frame of the CFU’s message. They show more of a neutralising effect on the CFU’s diagnostic and prognostic frame, rather than an aggressive anti-union agenda. The complexity of how counter-frames are developed can be recognised as they too have linked histories and evolutions during social movements.

Overall there was a greater propensity for participants to discuss counter organising as opposed to elements of discourse that make up the conceptual counter-frame. Specific mention of counter organising occurred in the interviews. One former organiser described a budding

counter movement: "...everywhere we went they followed us. Everywhere, you know they tried to have a counter-organising. It wasn't easy, it was very hard." Racism was also mentioned as a part of anti-union activities. One former staff member highlighted the issue of racism in relation to new immigrant farmworkers:

The other thing I think that was a massive challenge through all of this stuff is racism. Racism either overt or lack of awareness, saying they are all the same. People just - especially in that time period in 80s – 'you know if you don't like it here go back home' kind of stuff (Staff Member 2).

In 1980, the CFU's vice president was attacked in what the CFU claimed were attempts to scare farmworkers from organising (CFU 1980b). In the same year, after the CFU earned a certification, one member was beaten by people who "...didn't want a fucking East Indian walking their streets" (CFU 1980c, 3). Racism, threats of violence, and actual attacks were regarded as prominent by all of the former organisers or members interviewed. One former member indicated the CFU offices had windows smashed several times. The counter organising described here almost functions as a counter-prognostic frame that goes beyond rebutting or neutralising a group's position but directly undermining or disrupting the group all together to stop the production of their ideas. How counter-framing fits in with acts of suppression or violence by the state, groups, or individuals could be explored further in the framing literature. In the case of the CFU the counter frame was both potent as a competing voice and physical obstacle. However, more concrete structural challenges and community division were identified as more significant barriers for the CFU's longevity.

## **Structural Challenges**

Several structural challenges beset the CFU throughout their time organising farmworkers. These structural challenges were identified by participants and were primarily related to the composition and geography of farming in the Lower Mainland and the legislative hurdles for unions in BC. While framing was vital to organising and helped to combat many of the challenges the CFU had, it was much more difficult to move beyond the structural limitations that are presented here.

Farm size and seasonality were major structural constraints identified in the interviews. Table 3 shows average farm sizes in Western Canada leading up to the CFU's height of activity. It is quite apparent that BC had the smallest farm sizes when compared to Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. This small size was cited as a major problem for the CFU's organising efforts because there were very few workers on each farm. One former staff member described the situation saying that:

It was small small farms...At that time, most of the unions, the traditional unions were not organising small workplaces. Because it takes so much money and so much effort to keep them serviced. You may as well organise 500 people than organise 10 (Staff Member 2).

	<b>Average Acres /Year</b>			
<b>Province</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1976</b>
BC	178	226	316	311
Alberta	527	645	790	817
Saskatchewan	550	686	845	923
Manitoba	338	420	543	593

**Table 3:** Canadian farm sizes: western and prairie provinces (Adapted from Binning 1986).

Coinciding with these small farms and small units of workers was the proclivity of farming in the Lower Mainland to be dominated by temporary seasonal work. One former organiser commented on the challenge of seasonality in sustaining the union:

Yeah, the goals remained the same of course [when the] union was established and you know a union can only be sustained if there is not only support for it and also you know there had to be a pool of workers to be organised. When you are organising a group of seasonal farmworkers they become members and then they are there temporarily because once they find a job somewhere else they (are) no longer farmworkers. So it was extremely difficult to organise (Organiser 2).

Another major issue with seasonality was union dues. One former staff member indicated that seasonal workers only “paid a membership but they didn’t pay union dues” (Staff Member 2). Furthermore, they noted that the CFU was “always trying to keep the seasonal ones, to sustain their own union, to stand up for that” (Staff Member 2). Small units of workers at individual farms and a primarily seasonal worker base meant it was problematic trying to sustain an established union. The structural limitations of what actually constituted a union at the time under BC legislation further exhausted the CFU’s ability to sustain itself.

Forming a certified union versus just organising under the CFU name became a central problem for the CFU. One former staff member described the situation when the CFU was first attempting to establish themselves as an official union:

And what was so interesting was that the traditional unions, including the Federation of Labour, nobody knew how to get a new union created - because their unions have been around for so long, they didn't even have that information (Staff Member 2).

Learning how to become a legitimised union was only the initial problem. In order to become a union, certifications were needed, which as discussed earlier were hard fought and easily lost.

One former staff member described the attempt to become an official union as chaotic:

Because you'd have to go through certification. Then you'd have to sign up members. Then you'd have to go to the LRB. Then you'd win or not win and then you had to deal with farmers who didn't know what the hell was going on, there was no way they were going to have a union in their farm. So, again probably no more than twenty workers per place took a lot of time and we even went on strike at both of those places. Then you had strike stuff going on and rallies going on to support them (Staff Member 2).

This ties back to the shift, where the CFU began to focus on traditional union formations as the point at which the CFU began to decline. A former organiser said that “after - several years of that work we were not able to sustain. You could not continue” (Organiser 1). Similarly, another staff member said, “And at a certain point if you only have 3 or 4 or 5 people who are full time, they can only put their energy into certain places at once” (Staff Member 1). The mobilisation of support began to degrade also. One former staff member discussed how financial support began to dwindle:

Did the traditional trade union movement start to tire of the struggle? Because they had been financially supporting for 5 or 6 years, but by that stage in the game we may have had four certifications. But union dues out of those certifications didn't bring very much money in (Staff Member 2).

Trying to maintain the CFU under these structural challenges was too difficult. But alongside structural constraints, conflicts were evolving amongst the South Asian community. This was also a significant factor that weakened the position of the CFU.



## ***Community Challenges and CFU Organising***

The South Asian community and South Asian diaspora in BC is often misunderstood by those outside of its midst. Immigration flows from India to Canada and the social identities of these immigrant populations are “the outcome of complex colonial historical processes” (Walton-Roberts 2003, 248). Particular views and longstanding discriminatory practices in Canada toward South Asian immigrants are what had pushed them to work in marginal agricultural jobs in the first place (Demeritt 1995; Walton-Roberts 2003). The CFU, with the exception of a few attempts to organise French workers in the Okanagan and predominately white, Mexican, and Caribbean tobacco workers in Ontario, focused all of its efforts on Punjabi South Asian farmworkers in the Lower Mainland. Key organisers and members were primarily South Asians who saw a need within their own community.

A major complicating matter in the case of the CFU, was that the majority of labour contractors and in some cases, farmers or growers were also South Asian men. A former organiser explained the trouble with labour contractors:

Most the labour contractors at that time - They were from the mainly same community. Majority of the people who work in the fields, in the Fraser Valley area, were from the South Asian community and the labour contractors were also. So they thought they had - they had big advantage over them, which they had actually because you know the language barriers and the lack of knowledge of - about their rights. They were told you could do such and such thing but not that much else. So they were controlled (Organiser 1).

All of the former organisers and members spent a significant amount of time describing this situation. One former staff member said, “but they still know culturally how to oppress each other” (Staff Member 2). Another member explained their own view on this kind of cultural

oppression. They described how labour contractors may have been immigrants who had once held land in India and carried a different view of workers upon arriving in Canada:

So people with land felt that they were, because of their, you know birth, they were higher. So they had this mindset where the workers - didn't mean anything to them. So that's how they treated these workers. And workers on the other hand also came from the same background and they had no idea they could actually do something about the situation (Member 3).

This situation or fear of going against a labour contractor led to a lot of initial challenges for the organising of farmworkers. A former organiser outlined the strategies they had to employ to protect workers from potential threats from above:

So what we had to do, we had to go to people's houses. And they were very intimidated - they were not willing to talk with us because the moment the labour contractor or farmer would find out, see that they were in touch with the union or with me or other people, they were totally told not to come to work (the) next day. There was no protection. So it was so much difficult, so what we did - we called different organising method we called kitchen meetings. So we would contact one worker who would either be sympathetic or aware of his or her rights a little bit. So they would then invite some of their friends to their house - so we were meeting secretly you know. And then we would you know, we started trying to go (to) the temple - the Sikh Temple - that's where the majority of these people were attending their religious services on the weekends. But we were not allowed. Because most of those temples were controlled by the labour contractors or the farmers - so they didn't like it (Organiser 1).

Workers were intimidated and afraid of losing their job by even being in contact with the union. Several former organisers noted how contractors often brought new workers to the Sikh Temple or the Gurdwara to strengthen their relationship. This is what was seen as part of the cultural exploitation. Religious conflicts evolving in the community were according to all of the former

organisers and members were a central part of the community strife that in many respects disabled the CFU from sustained organising. A brief history is needed to take up these conflicts further.

The first Sikhs arriving from India to BC was in 1897 for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and again in 1902 for the coronation of Edward VII on their route to England from South East Asia. These visits left an impression and resulted in Sikhs immigrating to Canada up until the discriminatory 1908 banning of any immigrants who were not travelling on a continuous journey (Walton-Roberts 1998). There is a wealth of history on South Asian immigration to Canada after this period, including the notable Komagata Maru incident, which is not discussed in this thesis. This history is rich and represents part of the complexities of the South Asian community during the time of the CFU. Fast forwarding to the inception of the CFU, a significant Sikh population amongst South Asians in Canada had taken root, with the Lower Mainland still being a substantial host to their community many years later (Walton-Roberts 1998). Navigating this community was essential for keeping the CFU established. One former staff member described navigating the community specifically as a key challenge for the CFU sustaining itself:

[...] because you've got a small group of dedicated Punjabi organisers who are not attached to temples. Then you've got a new, relatively new, latest wave of immigration in that time period was the Punjabi community. So you've got the owners, the contractors, you've got the people who don't want to push anything. Out of the group, the only ones with the temple connection were the executive like the farmworker executive. But because they were doing this, they had a hard time within their own community. If you're talking challenges. Sustaining that. Sustaining the ability to move within that community, safely and with support (Staff Member 2).

Another former member described this challenge of navigating the community by describing access to the Gurdwara:

That thing was very sort of significant in the sense that the contractors and the farmers had money, they would initiate sort of ceremonies in the temple, they would invite the workers and everybody else. And so - there were incidents I remember where the Gurdwara would not allow union people to come and talk. Because of that influence. They couldn't say it openly but it was sort of played out. But eventually, these were Sikhs and Punjabis who exploited other Punjabis, the majority of them. It wasn't white people exploiting Punjabis, it was mainly Punjabis and contractors were all Punjabis (Member 3).

This challenge of navigating the community was further exacerbated when the Sikh community itself was facing its own internal struggles. In India, issues of separatism and the political independence of a Sikh state was rising. These issues had tangible impacts on Sikh populations in Canada (Walton-Roberts 1998) and this was evidenced by former CFU organisers and members. A former staff member discussed the situation as a critical moment in the CFU's history:

And then what happened – that was even more devastating was the Sikh Separatist movement, and at that point there was a division within the community. And the people who were the union organisers were – were considered social activists, Marxists, communists by the community members. Whether they were or they weren't isn't the point, the point is that they were in a way secularists and they actually formed groups when the Sikh in India – so basically the politics that happened in India where the Gandhi government invaded the Golden Temple created a huge backlash even over here so that Sikh members, some Sikhs were attacking some other South Asian groups, such as Hindus, Muslims. So there was a split in the community and then within the Punjabi community there were some who were like secularists and some who were more religious [...] and what that did

was it made it harder and harder for the union to reach their audience in the same way...those identity politics issues that were affecting this new immigrant community also had repercussions on the ability to organise within the South Asian community (Staff Member 1).

Another former member noted how this evolved. They explained how over time a rift was forming between “progressive” and “traditional” Sikhs. These conflicts were often born out of cultural behaviours within the Gurdwara and often led to clashes in the community. What was most significant in their explanation was how these internal conflicts overshadowed the CFU and labour issues in the community:

[...] so new people won - they were pro-Sikh and pro -Khalistan, so within the Sikh community two sort of separate groups began (to) emerge. One was pro-Khalistan - that was happening in Punjab. The other was called more sort of traditional, who wanted to respect but still wanted to sit on the tables and eat. In Surrey - and it was a huge fight - they threw up the tables and had swords and everything. And that was between people who were pro-Khalistan at that time and more traditional people. And they won. So they controlled the Gurdwara's here. With this activity, everything else drowned. So the farmworkers issue was drowned [...] (Member 3).

Everything else drowned. All of the former members and organisers indicated that the CFU had faced various challenges. However, the struggle of maintaining a healthy presence within the community and being able to navigate said community effectively was a large focal point when it came to discussing why the CFU could not sustain itself.

### ***Summary: Why the CFU Could Not Sustain Itself***

The ways in which the CFU framed the farmworkers' struggles and need for a union were successful in garnering continued financial support and public appeal. Issues such as the exclusion of farmworkers from health and safety legislation, low wages, exposure to pesticides,

poor housing, unsafe transportation, and exploitation under labour contractors as farmers turned a blind eye to cheaper labour were what drove the CFU's actions. Farmworkers were being treated unjustly. The CFU was successful in raising awareness, which eventually resulted in farmworkers being included in health and safety legislation in 1993 (Berggold 2015). All of the former organisers and members echoed that this was a major victory of the CFU in its totality. Because of the FWOC and CFU took the first steps of raising awareness and using strategies that existed outside of typical union action they achieved resonance with broader publics and farmworkers that allowed for continued organising. The CFU was able to organise agricultural workers when others could not because of their focus on endogenous organising within their own cultural community and because this resonance outside of the workplace. However, despite this success the CFU eventually could not sustain itself.

There is a key difference between sustainment and failure. The latter implies that once a state of failure is reached there can no longer be any significance to what has happened. On the contrary, it was not until many years after the CFU's peak organising period in which any meaningful legislative change occurred. The CFU did face an eventual decline that was a combination of continual counter-framing of the movement, counter-organising efforts, structural challenge of BC's agricultural sector and bureaucratic processes, and significant division amongst the South Asian community. There is no simple answer to the end of the CFU but rather the result of complex historical processes and events that unfolded during its tenure. Just as there was no single axiomatic reason for organising or no single approach to organising, there is no single self-evident reason for the eventual decline. The CFU could not sustain organising because it no longer had the social licence to operate within the South Asian community. Furthermore, the challenge of organising seasonal workers and small units of year-

round workers under strict legal union guidelines also contributed to the CFU's inability to sustain itself. However, this decline does not negate the CFU's representation as a social movement. This leads the discussion into the final stage of this thesis, a discussion of how the CFU is better represented as a social movement.

## **CHAPTER VI: SOCIAL MOVEMENT OR TRADE UNION?**

One of the key aims of this thesis is to position the CFU as a social movement instead of only a former trade union. As demonstrated in Chapter IV, the CFU has engaged in diverse strategies in order to propel the organisation of agricultural workers for the first time in Canadian history. Furthermore, the challenges demonstrated in Chapter V are also unique pertaining to the social movement nature of the CFU. The CFU's identity was bound up in the challenge of promoting direct action as well as engaging in business unionism. The CFU's identity as a social movement or a trade union is important. Simply calling the CFU a former trade union dismisses the ground-breaking efforts of the FWOC and CFU to engage in a new form of social activism. By understanding the dynamics of unions and social movements a more nuanced understanding of the CFU's history and its outcomes is possible.

Because of these unique strategies of community organising, exposing discrimination and racism, and the mobilisation of broader public support many would argue the CFU is more of a social movement. However, just one interview with a former farmer and several conversations elsewhere during the research process made it clear that some simply remember it as a failed union or a nuisance born out of socialist sympathies. Furthermore, a lot of the discussion of the CFU has forgotten that the workers also are "complex beings, with multiple identities that go far beyond the workplace" (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011, 218). The lives of the farmworkers involved with the CFU have continued. Because of this over-determination of the CFU, it is important to revisit and revitalise its significance. Several approaches are used to answer the question of social movement versus trade union, several approaches are used. Firstly, drawing on the interviews undertaken for this project, the positionality of former members and organisers reveals the CFU was intentionally a social movement. The CFU had to be a social movement to



address the grievances farmworkers faced. Secondly, using Tufts (2009) Schumpeterian unionism model the CFU can be seen as more empirically engaging ‘social movement unionism.’ Unionism was in turn one part of the CFU as a social movement, not the sole purpose of the movement. The CFU had to act as a social movement with some trade union praxis to engage in the different scales of organising. It was necessary to navigate different spaces of organisation to accomplish the different goals the CFU had set out. What this research has ultimately revealed, is that the CFU was a social movement with a unique identity that included unionism to some extent.

### ***Participant Perspectives on the CFU as a Social Movement***

When discussing the CFU’s success and failures, certain former members and organisers explained why it was successful as a social movement. One former member explained the nature of the CFU as a social movement:

The CFU was never exclusively a trade union movement. It was always a social movement, and this is what made it different from traditional trade union organising at that time. It may have been how unions were organised 50 or 60 years ago but in terms of like – you had all these established unions – but we got to remember what was really important in the CFU story, it was not started by another union. It was, in a way indigenous to its own community. It was autonomous, it came out of its own community, it initiated through its own community (Staff Member 1).

There was always a focus on the South Asian community. Another former organiser explained this primary focus was at the heart of the leadership:

Our efforts were primarily focused in the Indo-Canadian farmworkers because most of us were Indo-Canadians and we knew that when the contract system was

working Indo-Canadian labour contractors taking Indo-Canadian workers to the farms and you know - and that's our understanding [...] (Organiser 2).

The CFU started as the FWOC, a committee. It grew as a campaign to raise awareness alongside the goal of eventually starting a union for farmworkers. It was a far cry from the traditional trade unions that supported it. Various unions and the broader public that supported the CFU fleshed out the social movement nature of the CFU. Social movements draw on a sense of place constructed temporally from class, ethnicity, gender, and history across different spaces (Miller 2000). The CFU positioned the fields and farms as places of social exploitation. The CFU drew on the sense of place from both the farmworkers and proponents of their struggle who were previously never involved in agriculture, such as the traditional unions or ESL teachers. The CFU created a wider consensus and grafting of various groups to the cause in order to start developing social change and challenging social hierarchies; hierarchies such as the labour contractors versus farmworkers. One former staff member linked the CFU as a movement occurring in a time of increasing activism:

[...] I think the farmworkers' phenomenon, the CFU phenomenon was also situated within that decade of high activism going on with labour itself. So we (were) part of the operation solidarity movement. We walked in those 60,000 strong marches as well. We were part of the peace movement that was going on. We were always there with our banners, farmworkers. So the farmworkers would also join up with other people's causes. Especially the activist farmworkers that we have. So we'd be in the peace demos, the women's demos, the labour demos, whoever people had supported us we would come back and return. So that started bridging a lot of those gaps but I think the how did it get sustained so long was the commitment and passion, pure grit of primary organisers [...] (Staff Member 2).

This period would turn to shape much of the newer currents on social movement theories such as RMT and social farming which became central to the study of social movements (Snow and Benford 2000). The CFU was part of that time, although never captured by scholars using these theories. The financial support and solidarity the CFU gained were earned by the social framing described in Chapter IV. The CFU was successful because they exposed what farmworkers lives were really like. Because CFU started as a group of individuals seeking social change and projected issues as the social exploitation of farmworkers it can be argued that from the very beginning the FWOC and CFU was a social movement, not a trade union. The overarching goal of the FWOC and CFU was to improve the rights of farmworkers, not unionise them.

However, there was the significant shift in the CFU, as seen in Chapter IV. The CFU began to focus on traditional union formation and was largely unsuccessful after certifications were lost. Despite being unable to sustain organising at the farm level, the CFU was eventually instrumental in gaining the long awaited health and safety legislative changes in 1993. One former member carefully explained this shift and its significance to the legitimacy of the CFU:

So then the question is why did the CFU change the laws – versus actually changing the conditions at the point of production. In other words, in the years from 1979 to say 1991, in that period of 12 years when the CFU was most active [...] the campaign of the union switched from being focused on the issues at the point of production, in other words farm workers themselves going to work, and became more about over that 12 years, because more and more about changing the laws at an institutional level. Part of that is because it was so hard to organise them at the point of production... that part of the story means that now the union's focus is changing away from holding these contracts of 10-20 workers on a farm to now focusing on changing the rules on unemployment insurance, changing – getting health and safety. Right – now those campaigns had always co-existed in the

beginning, but eventually one became more prominent than the other (Staff Member 1).

Without simplifying the historical trajectory of the CFU here it is apparent that interviewed members and organisers felt as though the CFU was never limited to simply a trade union setup, despite a period where traditional union activity was a priority. Rather than taking the CFU case study and arguing which parts were trade unionism and which parts were a social movement, instead the CFU can be understood as engaging in a new form of social activism. Social movements work to address “grievances through efforts to create new bases of meaning, identity, and security” (Miller 2000, 47). In order to address this complexity between social movements and unions the next section is focused on the CFU as a historical precursor to Steven Tufts’ Schumpeterian unionism (Tufts 2009). This particular categorisation of unionism is an appropriate merger between social movements and traditional unions.

### ***The CFU as a Precursor to Schumpeterian Unionism?***

Tufts (2009) was focused on finding what lay beyond the typical characterisations of unionism and how to differentiate between business unionism and social unionism. He compared Defensive unionism, Ideal-renewed social movement unionism, and his own Schumpeterian unionism. This model does not separate social movements from labour movements, which makes it a powerful conceptual tool to devise a more concrete understanding of the CFU. Social movements and labour movements coalesce and share similarities with each other. This has been demonstrated by how the CFU engaged in traditional union organising as well as community organising and direct action throughout its lifespan. Tufts analysed four key elements of unionism: “intra-institutional organising, extra-institutional organising, labour-management relations, and labour-state relations (Tufts 2009, 982). Table 4 (page 78) uses the key principles

of Tufts Schumpeterian unionism and compares it to the broad strokes of the CFU, where several similarities can be drawn.

The CFU engaged in more Schumpeterian intra-institutional organising by focusing on farmworkers (seasonal and year-round) exclusively. Additionally, the CFU undertook never before seen collective bargaining that included farmworkers and growers. Their alliances started on the ground with pro-union workers who drew in their friends and family. This was strategic and brought unionism beyond the shop floor so to speak. The CFU differed slightly when it came to organising outside of the membership. Connections with international or global unions were purely symbolic with the UFW. Tufts aligns these symbolic relationships with traditional defensive unionism (2009). At this time the CFU was not engaged in any kind of global union, it was purely focused on organising workers within Canada. However, the CFU had hoped to build central and regional labour bodies, but because of its infancy and primarily being focused on the Lower Mainland South Asian workers, it was never achieved. In terms of labour-management relations, the CFU drifted heavily in favour of social-movement unionism with a focus on workplace militancy. The CFU limitedly cooperated with farmers or growers (employers). There was the one isolated reference to cooperation with a labour contractor in Chapter IV. This might be considered what Tufts calls ‘tactical cooperation’ in Schumpeterian unionism, but it was hardly the norm for the CFU. Training opportunities like the ESL programme were class-based and entirely never before accessed opportunities for workers, which again aligns perfectly with social-movement unionism in Tufts model (2009). Lastly, CFU labour-state relations show very ephemeral cooperation with the state. The CFU was never fully partisan and had to tacitly work with both the New Democratic Party and the Social-Credit Party during different periods. The CFU was clearly a sectorally driven union but was closer to social-

<b>Elements of Union Activity</b>		<b>Schumpeterian Unionism</b>	<b>CFU Unionism</b>
Intra-institutional organising	Recruitment	Strategic campaigns, selective targets.	Strategic campaigns, farmworkers target.
	Servicing and collective bargaining.	Servicing efficiencies, bargaining innovation.	Never seen before bargaining with farmworkers.
	Coalition building.	Strategic alliances.	Strategic alliances with sympathetic farmworkers or community members. 'Kitchen meetings.'
Extra-institutional organising	International solidarity.	Situated Networks	Symbolic connections to the UFW and other labour movements.
	Mergers.	Strategic capacities.	Mergers non-issue.
	Central labour bodies.	Re-imagined, multi-scalar.	Attempted different bodies (Ontario, Okanagan, and Lower Mainland).
Labour-management relations	Labour–management cooperation.	'tactical cooperation', minimal trust.	Key organising with farmworkers, workplace militancy.
	Training.	Vocational competitive training, administrative union education	Class-based learning, new opportunities.
Labour-state relations	Economic development.	Ephemeral, multi-scalar, uneven tri-partism.	State relationship tenuous, almost ephemeral. However more partisan to labour sympathetic parties
	Labour market regulation	Sectoral, management of dissent	Sectoral, but also centered at the margins.

**Table 4:** A comparison of Schumpeterian unionism (Tufts 2009) versus CFU unionism.

-movement unionism here as it was “focused at the margins” (2009). In this case, farmworkers really were the margin.

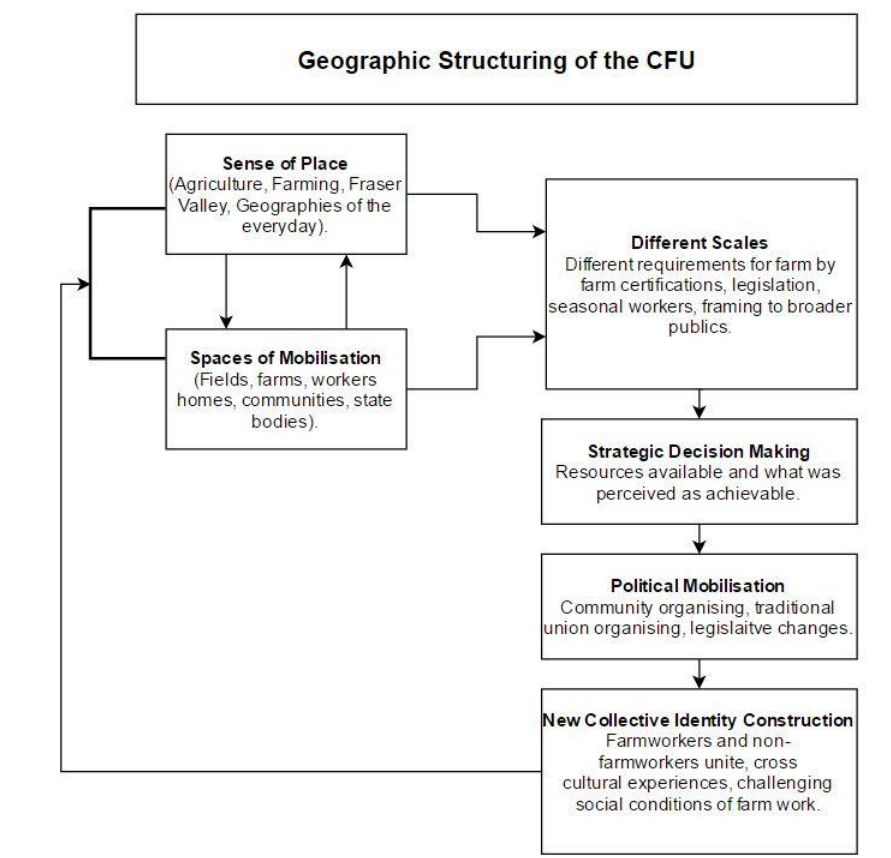
The use of Tufts (2009) model for Schumpeterian unionism can be easily problematized. Firstly, this model was made many years after the CFU, focused on the service sector, and still would likely never be able to fully explain all unions and their activities. Similarly, applying social framing theory to the CFU was also the application of a theory only starting to be fully realised after the CFU was no longer active. There is still merit to these applications and Schumpeterian unionism is useful. Schumpeterian unionism recognises the idea that social movement unionism is as real as any other form of unionism. It does not attempt to separate social action and union establishment. The CFU borrows elements from all three of Tufts categories: defensive unionism, social-movement unionism, and Schumpeterian unionism. More specifically the CFU has strong tendencies towards ideal-renewed social-movement unionism and Schumpeterian unionism. Because of this, this thesis argues that the CFU is a precursor to Tufts (2009) Schumpeterian unionism. Its trajectories and methods evolved rapidly over the height of its organising period drawing on its inception as a social movement with union goals.

The CFU is best characterised as a social movement that attempted to create a union ideal drawing both on what former unions were at the time and what the potential of new union concepts could be. The CFU engaged in a social movement and trade union model that did “not recognize the primacy of any one particular scale, but instead focused on how different scales of worker mobilization or state control [that] can be engaged with to the advantage of workers” (Tufts 2009, 989) throughout its history as it navigated and was part of the different locales of social action. Schumpeterian unionism negates the separation of ahistorical representations that the CFU is merely a trade union or merely a social movement. There is no hierarchy between the

two, but rather an enmeshed movement that occurred in and operated at different scales and spaces, spaces with understandings of territory and place.

### ***Summary: A Matter of Scales, Spaces, and Places***

Social movements and trade unions are geographically structured where space is part of their production, not just a container in which they exist. Sense of place, spaces of mobilisation, and social movements interact on different scales to produce social change. Geographic structuring can either make or break the success of a social movement. This structuring has flows that are evident in the history of the CFU. Figure 2 outlines how the CFU as a social movement was dynamically and spatially constituted. Sense of place and the physical places of mobilisation



**Figure 2: Geographic structuring of the CFU, flows and influences of space and place in the organising period (1979 – 1993).**



interacted with each other to define what social change was desired or resisted against. There were competing social cleavages between farmworkers, labour contractors, farmers, the CFU, and government bodies. Farmworkers began to see the workplace as a site of exploitation, whereas labour contractors and farmers disagreed with this understanding. The FWOC and CFU recognised farmworkers' concerns and initiated a movement to expose farmworkers' grievances that were largely ignored by farmers and the government during this time. The CFU engaged in framing, as discussed in Chapter IV, and direct action at different scales to mobilise farmworkers. The CFU engaged farmworkers in their homes, the fields, and in the Gurdwara. Additionally, many there were widespread demonstrations and public meetings across the province to start raising awareness. Scale was vitally important to the strategic decision making of the CFU, the political mobilisation, and the construction of new collective identities. Scale issues are part of social movements and emphasis on different scales can be powerful or disabling for a social movement's legitimacy and success (Miller 2000; Kurtz 2003). The CFU operated at different scales during its organising and faced challenges because of strategic decision making and political mobilisation at different scales.

The CFU was unable to sustain broad-based and widely dispersed seasonal worker organisation and shifted focus on a farm by farm scale of organising. Battles went from being decentralised protests and demonstrations across the province towards specific places, in this case, to target farms and workers for certifications. Being caught up in this territorial scale of organising eventually exhausted the resources and energies of both the social movement and union. This was referred to as "activist burnout" (Staff Member 2). In Chapter V, former organisers recognised that the traditional union organising took away from the overall momentum of the social movement. The traditional unions that first supported the CFU

discontinued their support. The Canadian Labour Congress, one of the strongest financial supports of the CFU, had withdrawn funding in 1991 (CFU 1991b). The issue of scales of organising and the political opportunities at these scales severely affected the goals of the CFU. By shifting the scale of organising, the CFU exhausted more of its financial and human resources.

Community strife also hampered organising across scales, whether it be traditional union organising or community organising. The “porous boundaries between unionism and community politics, between struggles in and beyond the workplace” (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011, 224) made organising workers untenable as divisions in the South Asian community grew. The contested identity politics of the community silenced the labour issues. The Gurdwara became one of the most recognised spaces of contestation instead of the workplace. The Gurdwara, the various farms, worker’s homes and communities all host and produce their own sets of circumstances, constraints, and opportunities for social action which changed as the CFU continued to organise farmworkers. The CFU had been barred from the Gurdwara and branded as secularists or Marxists. In the end, these spaces and attached understandings of place could no longer be traversed by the CFU effectively. This led to the shift in scales of political mobilisation away from the point of production towards state control and legislation regarding farmworkers.

While campaigns to change the law were prominent throughout the CFU’s time it became the most successful political opportunity structure from which to actually make a lasting change for farmworkers. All of the interviews with former organisers and members indicate this was the most positive change achieved after a long struggle. The legislative apparatus as a political opportunity structure was still accessible in the long run versus the farmworker’s communities and spaces of work. The CFU recognised that an all-out attack on as many fronts were necessary

to challenge the diverse issues that farmworkers faced. The CFU was unable to abolish capital structures, both the piece-rate and the labour contractor systems. In this case, the social movement, the workers involved, and the CFU and its alliances were all unable to fully challenge the capital structures of agricultural labour in BC. However, the different strategies employed by the CFU allowed for the sustained organisation of farmworkers for the first time in Canadian history. There were new collective identities formed amongst farmworkers and CFU supporters to challenge the status quo of farm work as an afterthought in the province. This is significant, even if the CFU and its proponents could not achieve all its goals and sustain its union status.

The CFU's different scales of organising, strategic decision making, and political mobilisation influenced both its success and failures. Widespread and decentralised organising made the CFU initially successful as a social movement. Yet centralised traditional organising exasperated the movement's resources and energies. Scale has shown why the CFU was able to gain movement life where it did and the contexts of which the movement occurred: contested framings of farmworkers issues, the challenges faced the communal arena, structural constrictions, and the spirit of the movement's agency grafting in support from different groups outside of the farmworkers community. The CFU moved far beyond a trade union and arguably never really succeeded as one. This was a result of the understanding of place. The CFU as an organisation understood that a simple union would not be enough to challenge the hegemonic structures of discrimination under the law, and racism, cultural exploitation, and ignorance on the part of many. The CFU was about a contestation of these discourses and their actions – first witnessed in the fields of the Lower Mainland, but never forgotten outside of them. Because of

the CFU's social movement characteristics, it was successful in advocating for farmworkers and challenging the social and economic geographies of farm labour in BC.

## **CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSIONS**

Contrary to the common discourses and perceptions of agriculture in BC (Demeritt 1995), there is a profound history of labour struggles where agricultural workers have tried to earn equal rights and recognition (Jensen 2014). For many years, these workers remained excluded from legal protections that other workers benefited from in the province. The FWOC and CFU played a pivotal role in changing this. The FWOC and CFU were able to organise agricultural workers in Canada unlike ever before. When significant numbers of South Asian farmworkers began to express dissatisfaction with unsafe working conditions, wages, poor housing conditions, dangerous transportation to and from work, and a hierarchy of exploitive labour arrangements under labour contracting a restlessness for social change would not be stopped. Drawing primarily from a core leadership of South Asian men the CFU was able to mobilise as a social movement to advocate for farmworkers. The CFU framed farmworkers' struggles through different media. The framing analysis in this thesis reveals how discriminatory practices had excluded farmworkers from meaningful protections under the law, which in turn gave space for their exploitation. Farmworkers had no recourse if they were injured, unfairly fired, paid improperly, or if they worked in unsafe environments. By bringing these grievances to light and framing issues, the CFU drew in support from a significant number of trade unions and individuals outside of the farmworkers community. The CFU functioned as a social movement concentrating on community organising and advocacy, as well as earning the first ever official union certifications for farmworkers in Canadian history. The CFU did not separate unionism from social activism. Over time, the CFU grew and used diverse strategies to provide services to farmworkers, organise official union contracts on certain farms, and pressure the government into making legislative change. The use of social framing theory in conjunction with qualitative

interviews in this thesis shows that it is because of diverse political mobilisation that the CFU acted as not just a trade union but as a social movement. Because the CFU was a social movement drawing from a cultural base of workers, they were able to organise agricultural workers when others could not. However, the CFU was unable to sustain itself for a multiplicity of reasons.

This thesis has evidenced that the CFU could not sustain itself for three core reasons: counter-framing and counter organising, structural challenges, and community challenges. As successful as the CFU was, it was an immense challenge to continue a social movement organisation indefinitely. Farmers and labour contractors acted as powerful figures and resisted the CFU's efforts from the very beginning. This went beyond simply refuting the claims the CFU made and metastasised in physical violence and threats. Additionally, the very geographic construction of farming in the Lower Mainland made it incredibly difficult to sustain organisation. Farm work was seasonal in the Lower Mainland and a significant number of workers would not return after the season ended. This makes any sort of sustained base of workers whether as part of a union or direct action initiatives nearly impossible. Farm sizes in BC were also small compared to other provinces, so any full-time year-round workers existed in dispersed areas and small numbers. When the CFU tried to engage these workers in traditional union formation it exhausted their resources and took away from the widespread mobilisation of farmworkers across the Lower Mainland. Furthermore, the cultural base of the union began to face its own internal struggle. When rising angst between more orthodox and progressive Sikhs was growing in the Canadian Gurdwaras, issues of labour became drowned out. These issues were not unimportant to the community and that meant the CFU could no longer navigate the farmworkers' community the same way. They were seen as outsiders and ostracised. The

combined challenges the CFU faced were too much and eventually spent the energy of the movement, despite its resounding successes.

The CFU was a social movement that engaged farmworkers' issues from many different vantage points. The CFU could not have evolved successfully without transcending the traditional organisation strategies and structures of labour unions prior. This thesis has argued that the historical representation of the CFU is clouded, where it is only symbolised as a failed trade union. This is not the case, the CFU was largely unsuccessful when only looking at it as a trade union yes, but was widely successful as a social movement. The CFU managed to organise a worker base that was previously considered unorganisable. Additionally, the CFU challenged the racial perceptions of farmworkers and fostered cross-cultural experiences. But perhaps most importantly, after working tirelessly, the CFU eventually managed to see agricultural workers folded into existing health and safety legislation in the province. By operating at different scales in organising efforts the CFU both succeeded in achieving its goals and faced new challenges to try and meet. This endogenous movement understood the spaces of agriculture and the everyday lives of farmworkers. Without this knowledge, they would not have been successful. By better understanding the history of the CFU as a social movement in BC's agricultural sector, a complete history is built where new changing labour arrangements and social movements amongst agricultural workers might be better understood drawing on this historical context. Labour and social movements will continue to evolve and build on top of BC's agricultural history, a history that should not be forgotten.

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## APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE & CODING CHART

<p><b>1. How long have you been farming or working on farms?</b></p> <p>a. What kind of work have you done/been doing?</p> <p>b. What would you say are the biggest changes in farming since you started?</p>
<p><b>2. Are you part of a Farmers Cooperative or Processor Group?</b></p> <p>a. What are the benefits of being part of these groups?</p> <p>b. Are there any disadvantages to being part of these groups?</p>
<p><b>3. How did you get involved in the movement to unionize and join the CFU?</b></p> <p>a. How did the movement to unionize start?</p> <p>b. How was it initially perceived by farmers?</p> <p>c. How was it initially perceived by others such as farm owners, government, non-agricultural labourers?</p> <p>d. What were reasons for or against unionization?</p>
<p><b>4. What person or group was most important for providing leadership to the union?</b></p> <p>a. Were there other organisations supporting the union?</p> <p>b. What do you feel were some important moments or events for the union?</p>
<p><b>5. What changes came with unionization?</b></p> <p>a. What were the original goals of the union and were they accomplished?</p> <p>b. Did the goals change over time? If so, why?</p> <p>c. Have working conditions changed and would you say they have improved?</p> <p>d. How was labour hired in the past versus now?</p> <p>e. Did (wages) change for farmers?</p>
<p><b>6. What do you feel are the biggest challenges for farmers and agricultural labourers today?</b></p> <p>a. What strategies or plans do you use to deal with these challenges?</p>
<p><b>7. Is there anyone you feel I should also speak with about these questions?</b></p>
<p><b>Closing Interview:</b></p> <p>Thank you again for being part of this interview. What you have shared has been very valuable. Feel free to contact me anytime if you have questions about the study or our interview.</p>

<b>Participant Identification</b>	<b>Coded Identity</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
Former Organiser of the FWOC and CFU	Organiser 1	12/14/2015
Former Organiser of the FWOC and CFU	Organiser 2	01/21/2016
Former Union Staff Member	Staff Member 1	01/14/2016
Former Union Staff Member	Staff Member 2	02/05/2016
Former Member	Member 3	01/26/2015
Former Farmer	Farmer 1	02/10/2016